

Joyce Hewelers

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LECTURES ON THE
ENGLISH POETS

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BY
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LECTURE I—INTRODUCTORY

ON POETRY IN GENERAL

THE best general notion which I can give of poetry is that it is the natural impression of any object or event, by its vividness exciting an involuntary movement of imagination and passion, and producing, by sympathy, a certain modulation of the voice, or sounds, expressing it.

In treating of poetry, I shall speak first of the subject-matter of it, next of the forms of expression to which it gives birth, and afterwards of its connection with harmony of sound.

Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men; for nothing but what so comes home to them in the most general and intelligible shape can be a subject for poetry. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. He who has a contempt for poetry cannot have much respect for himself, or for any thing else. It is not a mere frivolous

accomplishment (as some persons have been led to imagine), the trifling amusement of a few idle readers or leisure hours—it has been the study and delight of mankind in all ages. Many people suppose that poetry is something to be found only in books, contained in lines of ten syllables, with like endings: but wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony, as in the motion of a wave of the sea, in the growth of a flower, that ‘spreads its sweet leaves to the air, and dedicates its beauty to the sun’—*there* is poetry, in its birth. If history is a grave study, poetry may be said to be a graver: its materials lie deeper, and are spread wider. History treats, for the most part, of the cumbrous and unwieldy masses of things, the empty cases in which the affairs of the world are packed, under the heads of intrigue or war, in different states, and from century to century: but there is no thought or feeling that can have entered into the mind of man, which he would be eager to communicate to others, or which they would listen to with delight, that is not a fit subject for poetry. It is not a branch of authorship: it is ‘the stuff of which our life is made’. The rest is ‘mere oblivion’, a dead letter: for all that is worth remembering in life is the poetry of it. Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration, wonder, pity, despair, or madness, are all poetry. Poetry is that fine particle within us that expands, rarefies, refines, raises our whole being; without it ‘man’s life is poor as beasts’. Man is a poetical animal; and those of us who do not

study the principles of poetry act upon them all our lives, like Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who had always spoken prose without knowing it. The child is a poet, in fact, when he first plays at hide-and-seek, or repeats the story of Jack the Giant-killer; the shepherd-boy is a poet when he first crowns his mistress with a garland of flowers; the countryman when he stops to look at the rainbow; the city-apprentice when he gazes after the Lord-Mayor's show; the miser when he hugs his gold; the courtier, who builds his hopes upon a smile; the savage, who paints his idol with blood; the slave, who worships a tyrant, or the tyrant, who fancies himself a god—the vain, the ambitious, the proud, the choleric man, the hero and the coward, the beggar and the king, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, all live in a world of their own making; and the poet does no more than describe what all the others think and act. If his art is folly and madness, it is folly and madness at second hand. 'There is warrant for it'. Poets alone have not 'such seething brains, such shaping fantasies, that apprehend more than cooler reason' can.

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
 Are of imagination all compact.
 One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
 The madman. While the lover, all as frantic,
 Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
 The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
 Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to heav'n;
 And, as imagination bodies forth
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
 Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
 A local habitation and a name.
 Such tricks hath strong imagination.

If poetry is a dream, the business of life is much the same. If it is a fiction, made up of what we wish things to be, and fancy that they are because we wish them so, there is no other nor better reality. Ariosto has described the loves of Angelica and Medoro: but was not Medoro, who carved the name of his mistress on the barks of trees, as much enamoured of her charms as he? Homer has celebrated the anger of Achilles: but was not the hero as mad as the poet? Plato banished the poets from his Commonwealth, lest their description of the natural man should spoil his mathematical man, who was to be without passions and affections, who was neither to laugh nor weep, to feel sorrow nor anger, to be cast down nor elated by any thing. This was a chimera, however, which never existed but in the brain of the inventor; and Homer's poetical world has outlived Plato's philosophical Republic.

Poetry, then, is an imitation of nature, but the imagination and the passions are a part of man's nature. We shape things according to our wishes and fancies, without poetry; but poetry is the most emphatical language that can be found for those creations of the mind 'which ecstasy is very cunning in.' Neither a mere description of natural objects, nor a mere delineation of natural feelings, however distinct or forcible, constitutes the ultimate end and aim of poetry, without the heightenings of the imagination. The light of poetry is not only a direct, but also a reflected light, that, while it shews us the object, throws a sparkling radiance on all around it: the flame of the

passions, communicated to the imagination, reveals to us, with a flash of lightning, the inmost recesses of thought, and penetrates our whole being. Poetry represents forms chiefly as they suggest other forms; feelings, as they suggest forms or other feelings. Poetry puts a spirit of life and motion into the universe. It describes the flowing, not the fixed. It does not define the limits of sense, nor analyze the distinctions of the understanding, but signifies the excess of the imagination beyond the actual or ordinary impression of any object or feeling. The poetical impression of any object is that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power that cannot be contained within itself; that is impatient of all limit; that (as flame bends to flame) strives to link itself to some other image of kindred beauty or grandeur; to enshrine itself, as it were, in the highest forms of fancy, and to relieve the aching sense of pleasure by expressing it in the boldest manner, and by the most striking examples of the same quality in other instances. Poetry, according to Lord Bacon, for this reason, 'has something divine in it, because it raises the mind and hurries it into sublimity, by conforming the shows of things to the desires of the soul, instead of subjecting the soul to external things as reason and history do'. It is strictly the language of the imagination; and the imagination is that faculty which represents objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded, by other thought and feelings, into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power. This language is not the

less true to nature because it is false in point of fact; but so much the more true and natural, if it conveys the impression which the object under the influence of passion makes on the mind. Let an object, for instance, be presented to the senses in a state of agitation or fear—and the imagination will distort or magnify the object, and convert it into the likeness of whatever is most proper to encourage the fear. ‘Our eyes are made the fools’ of our other faculties. This is the universal law of the imagination,

That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy:
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is each bush suppos'd a bear!

When Iachimo says of Imogen,

The flame o’ th’ taper
Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids
To see the enclosed lights—

this passionate interpretation of the motion of the flame to accord with the speaker’s own feelings is true poetry. The lover, equally with the poet, speaks of the auburn tresses of his mistress as locks of shining gold, because the least tinge of yellow in the hair has, from novelty and a sense of personal beauty, a more lustrous effect to the imagination than the purest gold. We compare a man of gigantic stature to a tower: not that he is any thing like so large, but because the excess of his size beyond what we are accustomed to expect, or the usual size of things of the same

class, produces by contrast a greater feeling of magnitude and ponderous strength than another object of ten times the same dimensions. The intensity of the feeling makes up for the disproportion of the objects. Things are equal to the imagination, which have the power of affecting the mind with an equal degree of terror, admiration, delight, or love. When Lear calls upon the heavens to avenge his cause, 'for they are old like him', there is nothing extravagant or impious in this sublime identification of his age with theirs; for there is no other image which could do justice to the agonising sense of his wrongs and his despair!

Poetry is the high-wrought enthusiasm of fancy and feeling. As, in describing natural objects, it impregnates sensible impressions with the forms of fancy, so it describes the feelings of pleasure or pain, by blending them with the strongest movements of passion, and the most striking forms of nature. Tragic poetry, which is the most impassioned species of it, strives to carry on the feeling to the utmost point of sublimity or pathos, by all the force of comparison or contrast; loses the sense of present suffering in the imaginary exaggeration of it; exhausts the terror or pity by an unlimited indulgence of it; grapples with impossibilities in its desperate impatience of restraint; throws us back upon the past, forward into the future; brings every moment of our being, or object of nature, in startling review before us; and, in the rapid whirl of events, lifts us from the depths of woe to the highest contemplations on human life. When Lear says, of Edgar,

‘Nothing but his unkind daughters could have brought him to this’; what a bewildered amazement, what a wrench of the imagination, that cannot be brought to conceive of any other cause of misery than that which has bowed it down, and absorbs all other sorrow in its own! His sorrow, like a flood, supplies the sources of all other sorrow. Again, when, he exclaims in the mad scene, ‘The little dogs and all, Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me!’ it is passion lending occasion to imagination to make every creature in league against him, conjuring up ingratitude and insult in their least looked-for and most galling shapes, searching every thread and fibre of his heart, and finding out the last remaining image of respect or attachment in the bottom of his breast, only to torture and kill it! In like manner, the ‘So I am’ of Cordelia gushes from her heart like a torrent of tears, relieving it of a weight of love, and of supposed ingratitude, which had pressed upon it for years. What a fine return of the passion upon itself is that in Othello—with what a mingled agony of regret and despair he clings to the last traces of departed happiness—when he exclaims,

Oh now, for ever

Farewell the tranquil mind. Farewell content;
Farewell the plumed troops and the big war,
That make ambition virtue! Oh farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th’ ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war:
And O, you mortal engines, whose rude throats
Th’ immortal Jove’s dread clamours counterfeit,
Farewell! Othello’s occupation’s gone!

How his passion lashes itself up, and swells, and rages like a tide in its sounding course, when, in answer to the doubts expressed of his returning love, he says,

Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont:
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up.

The climax of his expostulation afterwards with Desdemona is at that line,

But there, where I had garner'd up my heart,
To be discarded thence!

One mode in which the dramatic exhibition of passion excites our sympathy without raising our disgust is that, in proportion as it sharpens the edge of calamity and disappointment, it strengthens the desire of good. It enhances our consciousness of the blessing by making us sensible of the magnitude of the loss. The storm of passion lays bare and shews us the rich depths of the human soul: the whole of our existence, the sum total of our passions and pursuits, of that which we desire, and that which we dread, is brought before us by contrast; the action and re-action are equal; the keenness of immediate suffering only gives us a more intense aspiration after, and a more intimate participation with, the antagonist world of good; makes us drink deeper of the cup of human life; tugs at the heart-strings; loosens the pressure about them; and calls the springs of thought and feeling into play with tenfold force.

Impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature, as well as of the sensitive—of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and ought to appeal to these different parts of our constitution, in order to be perfect. The domestic or prose tragedy, which is thought to be the most natural, is in this sense the least so, because it appeals almost exclusively to one of these faculties, our sensibility. The tragedies of Moore and Lillo, for this reason, however affecting at the time, oppress, and lie like a dead weight upon the mind, a load of misery which it is unable to throw off: the tragedy of Shakespeare, which is true poetry, stirs our inmost affections; abstracts evil from itself by combining it with all the forms of imagination, and with the deepest workings of the heart, and rouses the whole man within us.

The pleasure, however, derived from tragic poetry is not anything peculiar to it as poetry, as a fictitious and fanciful thing. It is not an anomaly of the imagination. It has its source and ground-work in the common love of strong excitement. As Mr Burke observes, people flock to see a tragedy; but, if there were a public execution in the next street, the theatre would very soon be empty. It is not, then, the difference between fiction and reality that solves the difficulty. Children are satisfied with the stories of ghosts and witches in plain prose: nor do the hawkers of full, true, and particular accounts of murders and executions, about the streets, find it necessary to have them turned into penny ballads before they can dispose of

these interesting and authentic documents. The grave politician drives a thriving trade of abuse and calumnies poured out against those whom he makes his enemies for no other end than that he may live by them. The popular preacher makes less frequent mention of heaven than of hell. Oaths and nicknames are only a more vulgar sort of poetry or rhetoric. We are as fond of indulging our violent passions as of reading a description of those of others. We are as prone to make a torment of our fears as to luxuriate in our hopes of good. If it be asked, Why we do so? the best answer will be, Because we cannot help it. The sense of power is as strong a principle in the mind as the love of pleasure. Objects of terror and pity exercise the same despotic control over it as those of love or beauty. It is as natural to hate as to love, to despise as to admire, to express our hatred or contempt, as our love or admiration.

Masterless passion sways us to the mood
Of what it likes or loathes.

Not that we like what we loathe; but we like to indulge our hatred and scorn of it; to dwell upon it, to exasperate our idea of it by every refinement of ingenuity and extravagance of illustration; to make it a bugbear to ourselves, to point it out to others in all the splendour of deformity, to embody it to the senses, to stigmatise it by name, to grapple with it in thought, in action, to sharpen our intellect, to arm our will against it, to know the worst we have to contend with, and to contend with it

to the utmost. Poetry is only the highest eloquence of passion, the most vivid form of expression that can be given to our conception of anything, whether pleasurable or painful, mean or dignified, delightful or distressing. It is the perfect coincidence of the image and the words with the feeling we have, and of which we cannot get rid in any other way, that gives an instant 'satisfaction to the thought'. This is equally the origin of wit and fancy, of comedy and tragedy, of the sublime and pathetic. When Pope says of the Lord Mayor's show,

Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er,
But lives in Settle's numbers one day more;

—when Collins makes Danger, 'with limbs of giant mould',

Throw him on the steep
Of some loose hanging rock asleep;

when Lear calls out, in extreme anguish,

Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
How much more hideous shew'st thou in a child
Than the sea-monster!—

— the passion of contempt in the one case, of terror in the other, and of indignation in the last is perfectly satisfied. We see the thing ourselves, and show it to others as we feel it to exist, and as, in spite of ourselves, we are compelled to think of it. The imagination, by thus embodying and turning them to shape, gives an obvious relief to the indistinct and importunate cravings of the will. We do not wish the thing to be so; but we wish it to appear such as it is. For knowledge is con-

scious power; and the mind is no longer, in this case, the dupe, though it may be the victim, of vice or folly.

Poetry is, in all its shapes, the language of the imagination and the passions, of fancy and will. Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the outcry which has been sometimes raised by frigid and pedantic critics, for reducing the language of poetry to the standard of common sense and reason: for the end and use of poetry, both at the first and now, was and is 'to hold the mirror up to nature', seen through the medium of passion and imagination, not divested of that medium by means of literal truth or abstract reason. The painter of history might as well be required to represent the face of a person who has just trod upon a serpent with the still-life expression of a common portrait, as the poet to describe the most striking and vivid impressions which things can be supposed to make upon the mind in the language of common conversation. Let who will strip nature of the colours and the shapes of fancy, the poet is not bound to do so; the impressions of common sense and strong imagination, that is, of passion and indifference, cannot be the same, and they must have a separate language to do justice to either. Objects must strike differently upon the mind, independently of what they are in themselves, as long as we have a different interest in them, as we see them in a different point of view, nearer or at a greater distance (morally or physically speaking), from novelty, from old acquaintance, from our ignorance of them, from

our fear of their consequences, from contrast, from unexpected likeness. We can no more take away the faculty of the imagination than we can see all objects without light or shade. Some things must dazzle us by their preternatural light; others must hold us in suspense, and tempt our curiosity to explore their obscurity. Those who would dispel these various illusions, to give us their drab-coloured creation in their stead, are not very wise. Let the naturalist, if he will, catch the glow-worm, carry it home with him in a box, and find it next morning nothing but a little grey worm; let the poet, or the lover of poetry, visit it at evening, when beneath the scented hawthorn and the crescent moon it has built itself a palace of emerald light. This is also one part of nature, one appearance which the glow-worm presents, and that not the least interesting; so poetry is one part of the history of the human mind, though it is neither science nor philosophy. It cannot be concealed, however, that the progress of knowledge and refinement has a tendency to circumscribe the limits of the imagination, and to clip the wings of poetry. The province of the imagination is principally visionary, the unknown and undefined: the understanding restores things to their natural boundaries, and strips them of their fanciful pretensions. Hence the history of religious and poetical enthusiasm is much the same; and both have received a sensible shock from the progress of experimental philosophy. It is the undefined and uncommon that gives birth and scope to the imagination; we can only fancy what we

do not know. As in looking into the mazes of a tangled wood we fill them with what shapes we please, with ravenous beasts, with caverns vast, and drear enchantments, so, in our ignorance of the world about us, we make gods or devils of the first objects we see, and set no bounds to the wilful suggestions of our hopes and fears;

And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
Hang on each leaf, and cling to every bough.

There can never be another Jacob's dream. Since that time the heavens have gone farther off, and grown astronomical. They have become averse to the imagination, nor will they return to us on the squares of the distances, or on Doctor Chalmers's *Discourses*. Rembrandt's picture brings the matter nearer to us. It is not only the progress of mechanical knowledge, but the necessary advances of civilization, that are unfavourable to the spirit of poetry. We not only stand in less awe of the preternatural world, but we can calculate more surely, and look with more indifference, upon the regular routine of this. The heroes of the fabulous ages rid the world of monsters and giants. At present we are less exposed to the vicissitudes of good or evil, to the incursions of wild beasts or 'bandit fierce', or to the unmitigated fury of the elements. The time has been that 'our fell of hair would at a dismal treatise rouse, and stir as life were in it'. But the police spoils all; and we now hardly so much as dream of a midnight murder. *Macbeth* is only tolerated in this country for the sake of the music; and

in the United States of America, where the philosophical principles of government are carried still farther in theory and practice, we find that the *Beggar's Opera* is hooted from the stage. Society, by degrees, is constructed into a machine that carries us safely and insipidly from one end of life to the other, in a very comfortable prose style.

Obscurity her curtain round them drew,
And siren Sloth a dull quietus sung.

The remarks which have been here made would, in some measure, lead to a solution of the question of the comparative merits of painting and poetry. I do not mean to give any preference, but it should seem that the argument, which has been sometimes set up, that painting must affect the imagination more strongly, because it represents the image more distinctly, is not well founded. We may assume, without much temerity, that poetry is more poetical than painting. When artists or connoisseurs talk on stilts about the poetry of painting, they show that they know little about poetry, and have little love for the art. Painting gives the object itself; poetry what it implies. Painting embodies what a thing contains in itself; poetry suggests what exists out of it, in any manner connected with it. But this last is the proper province of the imagination. Again, as it relates to passion, painting gives the event, poetry the progress of events: but it is during the progress, in the interval of expectation and suspense, while our hopes and fears are strained to the highest pitch of breathless agony, that the pinch of the interest lies

Between the acting of a dreadful thing
And the first motion, all the interim is
Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
The mortal instruments are then in council;
And the state of man, like to a little kingdom,
Suffers then the nature of an insurrection.

But by the time that the picture is painted, all is over. Faces are the best part of a picture; but even faces are not what we chiefly remember in what interests us most. But it may be asked then, Is there any thing better than Claude Lorraine's landscapes, than Titian's portraits, than Raphael's Cartoons, or the Greek statues? Of the two first I shall say nothing, as the are evidently picturesque, rather than imaginative. Raphael's Cartoons are certainly the finest comments that ever were made on the Scriptures. Would their effect be the same if we were not acquainted with the text? But the New Testament existed before the cartoons. There is one subject of which there is no cartoon, Christ washing the feet of the disciples the night before his death. But that chapter does not need a commentary! It is for want of some such resting-place for the imagination that the Greek statues are little else than specious forms. They are marble to the touch and to the heart. They have not an informing principle within them. In their faultless excellence they appear sufficient to themselves. By their beauty they are raised above the frailties of passion or suffering. By their beauty they are deified. But they are not objects of religious faith to us, and their forms are a reproach to common humanity. They seem to have no sympathy with us, and not to want our admiration.

Poetry in its matter and form is natural imagery or feeling, combined with passion and fancy. In its mode of conveyance it combines the ordinary use of language with musical expression. There is a question of long standing, in what the essence of poetry consists; or what it is that determines why one set of ideas should be expressed in prose, another in verse. Milton has told us his idea of poetry in a single line:

Thoughts that voluntary move
Harmonious numbers.

As there are certain sounds that excite certain movements, and the song and dance go together, so there are, no doubt, certain thoughts that lead to certain tones of voice, or modulations of sound, and change 'the words of Mercury into the song of Apollo'. There is a striking instance of this adaptation of the movement of sound and rhythm to the subject, in Spenser's description of the Satyrs accompanying Una to the cave of Sylvanus.

So from the ground she fearless doth arise,
And walketh forth without suspect of crime.
They, all as glad as birds of joyous prime,
Thence lead her forth, about her dancing round,
Shouting and singing all a shepherd's rhyme;
And with green branches strewing all the ground,
Do worship her as queen with olive garland crown'd
And all the way their merry pipes they sound,
That all the woods and doubled echoes ring;
And with their horned feet do wear the ground,
Leaping like wanton kids in pleasant spring;
So towards old Sylvanus they her bring,
Who, with the noise awaked, cometh out.

Faëry Queen, b. i. c. vi.

On the contrary, there is nothing either musical or natural in the ordinary construction of language. It is a thing altogether arbitrary and conventional. Neither in the sounds themselves, which are the voluntary signs of certain ideas, nor in their grammatical arrangements in common speech, is there any principle of natural imitation, or correspondence to the individual ideas, or to the tone of feeling with which they are conveyed to others. The jerks, the breaks, the inequalities, and harshnesses of prose, are fatal to the flow of a poetical imagination, as a jolting road or a stumbling horse disturbs the reverie of an absent man. But poetry makes these odds all even. It is the music of language, answering to the music of the mind, untying, as it were, 'the secret soul of harmony'. Wherever any object takes such a hold of the mind as to make us dwell upon it, and brood over it, melting the heart in tenderness, or kindling it to a sentiment of enthusiasm; wherever a movement of imagination or passion is impressed on the mind, by which it seeks to prolong and repeat the emotion, to bring all other objects into accord with it, and to give the same movement of harmony, sustained and continuous, or gradually varied according to the occasion, to the sounds that express it—this is poetry. The musical in sound is the sustained and continuous; the musical in thought is the sustained and continuous also. There is a near connection between music and deep-rooted passion. Mad people sing. As often as articulation passes naturally into intonation, there poetry begins. Where one idea gives a tone and colour to

others, where one feeling melts others into it, there can be no reason why the same principle should not be extended to the sounds by which the voice utters these emotions of the soul, and blends syllables and lines into each other. It is to supply the inherent defect of harmony in the customary mechanism of language, to make the sound an echo to the sense, when the sense becomes a sort of echo to itself—to mingle the tide of verse, ‘the golden cadences of poetry’, with the tide of feeling, flowing and murmuring as it flows—in short, to take the language of the imagination from off the ground, and enable it to spread its wings where it may indulge its own impulses.

Sailing with supreme dominion
Through the azure deep of air—

without being stopped, or fretted, or diverted with the abruptnesses and petty obstacles, and discordant flats and sharps of prose, that poetry was invented. It is to common language what springs are to a carriage, or wings to feet. In ordinary speech we arrive at a certain harmony by the modulations of the voice: in poetry the same thing is done systematically by a regular collocation of syllables. It has been well observed, that every one who declaims warmly, or grows intent upon a subject, rises into a sort of blank verse, or measured prose. The merchant, as described in Chaucer, went on his way ‘sounding always the increase of his winning’. Every prose-writer has more or less of rhythmical adaptation, except poets, who, when deprived of the regular mechanism of

verse, seem to have no principle of modulation left in their writings.

An excuse might be made for rhyme in the same manner. It is but fair that the ear should linger on the sounds that delight it, or avail itself of the same brilliant coincidence and unexpected recurrence of syllables, that have been displayed in the invention and collocation of images. It is allowed that rhyme assists the memory; and a man of wit and shrewdness has been heard to say that the only four good lines of poetry are the well-known ones which tell the number of days in the months of the year.

Thirty days hath September, etc.

But if the jingle of names assists the memory, may it not also quicken the fancy? and there are other things worth having at our fingers' ends besides the contents of the almanac. Pope's versification is tiresome, from its excessive sweetness and uniformity, Shakespeare's blank verse is the perfection of dramatic dialogue.

All is not poetry that passes for such; nor does verse make the whole difference between poetry and prose. The *Iliad* does not cease to be poetry in a literal translation; and Addison's *Campaign* has been very properly denominated a 'Gazette' in rhyme. Common prose differs from poetry, as treating for the most part either of such trite, familiar, and irksome matters of fact as convey no extraordinary impulse to the imagination, or else of such difficult and laborious processes of the under-

standing as do not admit of the wayward or violent movements either of the imagination or the passions.

I will mention three works which come as near to poetry as possible without absolutely being so, namely, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and the *Tales of Boccaccio*. Chaucer and Dryden have translated some of the last into English rhyme, but the essence and the power of poetry was there before. That which lifts the spirit above the earth, which draws the soul out of itself with indescribable longings, is poetry in kind, and generally fit to become so in name, by being 'married to immortal verse'. If it is of the essence of poetry to strike and fix the imagination, whether we will or no, to make the eye of childhood glisten with the starting tear, to be never thought of afterwards with indifference, John Bunyan and Daniel Defoe may be permitted to pass for poets in their way. The mixture of fancy and reality in the *Pilgrim's Progress* was never equalled in any allegory. His pilgrims walk above the earth, and yet are on it. What zeal, what beauty, what truth of fiction! What deep feeling in the description of Christian's swimming across the water at last, and in the picture of the Shining Ones within the gates, with wings at their backs and garlands on their heads, who are to wipe all tears from his eyes! The writer's genius, though not 'dipped in dews of Castalie', was baptised with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The prints in this book are no small part of it. If the confinement of Philoctetes in the island of

Lemnos was a subject for the most beautiful of all the Greek tragedies, what shall we say to Robinson Crusoe in his? Take the speech of the Greek hero on leaving his cave, beautiful as it is, and compare it with the reflections of the English adventurer in his solitary place of confinement. The thoughts of home, and of all from which he is for ever cut off, swell and press against his bosom, as the heaving ocean rolls its ceaseless tide against the rocky shore, and the very beatings of his heart become audible in the eternal silence that surrounds him. Thus he says :

As I walked about, either in my hunting, or for viewing the country, the anguish of my soul at my condition would break out upon me on a sudden, and my very heart would die within me to think of the woods, the mountains, the desert I was in; and how I was a prisoner, locked up with the eternal bars and bolts of the ocean, in an uninhabited wilderness, without redemption. In the midst of the greatest composures of my mind, this would break out upon me like a storm, and make me wring my hands, and weep like a child. Sometimes it would take me in the middle of my work, and I would immediately sit down and sigh, and look upon the ground for an hour or two together, and this was still worse to me, for if I could burst into tears or vent myself in words, it would go off, and the grief, having exhausted itself, would abate.

The story of his adventures would not make a poem like the *Odyssey*, it is true, but the relator had the true genius of a poet. It has been made a question whether Richardson's romances are poetry; and the answer, perhaps, is that they are not poetry, because they are not romance. The interest is worked up to an inconceivable height; but it is by an infinite number of little things, by incessant labour

and calls upon the attention, by a repetition of blows that have no rebound in them. The sympathy excited is not a voluntary contribution, but a tax. Nothing is unforced and spontaneous. There is a want of elasticity and motion. The story does not 'give an echo to the seat where love is throned'. The heart does not answer of itself like a chord in music. The fancy does not run on before the writer with breathless expectation, but is dragged along with an infinite number of pins and wheels, like those with which the Lilliputians dragged Gulliver pinioned to the royal palace. Sir Charles Grandison is a coxcomb. What sort of a figure would he cut, translated into an epic poem, by the side of Achilles? Clarissa, the divine Clarissa, is too interesting by half. She is interesting in her ruffles, in her gloves, her samplers, her aunts and uncles—she is interesting in all that is uninteresting. Such things, however intensely they may be brought home to us, are not conductors to the imagination. There is infinite truth and feeling in Richardson; but it is extracted from a *caput mortuum* of circumstances: it does not evaporate of itself. His poetical genius is like Ariel confined in a pine-tree, and requires an artificial process to let it out. Shakespeare says,

Our poesy is as a gum
Which issues whence 'tis nourished, our gentle flame
Provokes itself, and, like the current, flies
Each bound it chafes*.

* Burke's writings are not poetry, notwithstanding the vividness of the fancy, because the subject matter is abstruse and dry, not natural, but artificial. The differ-

I shall conclude this general account with some remarks on four of the principal works of poetry in the world, at different periods of history—Homer, the Bible, Dante, and, let me add, Ossian. In Homer, the principle of action or life is predominant; in the Bible, the principle of faith and the idea of Providence; Dante is a personification of blind will; and in Ossian we see the decay of life, and the fag end of the world. Homer's poetry is the heroic; it is full of life and action; it is bright as the day, strong as a river. In the vigour of his intellect, he grapples with all the objects of nature, and enters into all the relations of social life. He saw many countries, and the manners of many men; and he has brought them all together in his poem. He describes his heroes going to battle with a prodigality of life arising from an exuberance of animal spirits; we see them before us, their number, and their order of battle, poured out upon the plain, 'all plumed like ostriches, like eagles newly bathed, wanton as goats, wild as young bulls, youthful as May, and gorgeous as the sun at midsummer', covered

ence between poetry and eloquence is, that the one is the eloquence of the imagination, and the other of the understanding. Eloquence tries to persuade the will, and convince the reason: poetry produces its effects by instantaneous sympathy. Nothing is a subject for poetry that admits of a dispute. Poets are in general bad prose-writers, because their images, though fine in themselves, are not to the purpose, and do not carry on the argument. The French poetry wants the forms of the imagination. It is didactic more than dramatic. And some of our own poetry, which has been most admired, is only poetry in the rhyme, and in the studied use of poetic diction.

with glittering armour, with dust and blood; while the gods quaff their nectar in golden cups, or mingle in the fray; and the old men assembled on the walls of Troy rise up with reverence as Helen passes by them. The multitude of things in Homer is wonderful; their splendour, their truth, their force, and variety. His poetry is, like his religion, the poetry of number and form: he describes the bodies as well as the souls of men.

The poetry of the Bible is that of imagination and of faith: it is abstract and disembodied: it is not the poetry of form, but of power; not of multitude, but of immensity. It does not divide into many, but aggrandizes into one. Its ideas of nature are like its ideas of God. It is not the poetry of social life, but of solitude: each man seems alone in the world, with the original forms of nature, the rocks, the earth, and the sky. It is not the poetry of action or heroic enterprise, but of faith in a supreme Providence, and resignation to the power that governs the universe. As the idea of God was removed farther from humanity and a scattered polytheism, it became more profound and intense as it became more universal, for the Infinite is present to every thing: 'If we fly into the uttermost parts of the earth, it is there also; if we turn to the east or the west, we cannot escape from it'. Man is thus aggrandized in the image of his Maker. The history of the patriarchs is of this kind; they are founders of a chosen race of people, the inheritors of the earth; they exist in the generations which are to come after them. Their

poetry, like their religious creed, is vast, unformed, obscure, and infinite; a vision is upon it—an invisible hand is suspended over it. The spirit of the Christian religion consists in the glory hereafter to be revealed; but in the Hebrew dispensation, Providence took an immediate share in the affairs of this life. Jacob's dream arose out of this intimate communion between heaven and earth: it was this that let down, in the sight of the youthful patriarch, a golden ladder from the sky to the earth, with angels ascending and descending upon it, and shed a light upon the lonely place, which can never pass away. The story of Ruth, again, is as if all the depth of natural affection in the human race was involved in her breast. There are descriptions in the *Book of Job* more prodigal of imagery, more intense in passion, than any thing in Homer, as that of the state of his prosperity, and of the vision that came upon him by night. The metaphors in the *Old Testament* are more boldly figurative. Things were collected more into masses, and gave a greater *momentum* to the imagination.

Dante was the father of modern poetry, and he may therefore claim a place in this connection. His poem is the first great step from Gothic darkness and barbarism; and the struggle of thought in it to burst the thralldom in which the human mind had been so long held, is felt in every page. He stood bewildered, not appalled, on that dark shore which separates the ancient and the modern world; and saw the glories of antiquity dawning through the abyss of time, while revelation opened its passage to

the other world. He was lost in wonder at what had been done before him, and he dared to emulate it. Dante seems to have been indebted to the Bible for the gloomy tone of his mind, as well as for the prophetic fury which exalts and kindles his poetry; but he is utterly unlike Homer. His genius is not a sparkling flame, but the sullen heat of a furnace. He is power, passion, self-will personified. In all that relates to the descriptive or fanciful part of poetry he bears no comparison to many who had gone before, or who have come after, him; but there is a gloomy abstraction in his conceptions which lies like a dead weight upon the mind; a benumbing stupor, a breathless awe, from the intensity of the impression; a terrible obscurity, like that which oppresses us in dreams; an identity of interest, which moulds every object to its own purposes, and clothes all things with the passions and imaginations of the human soul—that make amends for all other deficiencies. The immediate objects he presents to the mind are not much in themselves; they want grandeur, beauty, and order; but they become everything by the force of the character he impresses upon them. His mind lends its own power to the objects which it contemplates, instead of borrowing it from them. He takes advantage even of the nakedness and dreary vacuity of his subject. His imagination peoples the shades of death, and broods over the silent air. He is the severest of all writers, the most hard and impenetrable, the most opposite to the flowery and glittering; who relies most on his own power, and the sense of it in others,

and who leaves most room to the imagination of his readers. Dante's only endeavour is to interest; and he interests by exciting our sympathy with the emotion by which he is himself possessed. He does not place before us the objects by which that emotion has been created; but he seizes on the attention by shewing us the effect they produce on his feelings; and his poetry, accordingly, gives the same thrilling and overwhelming sensation which is caught by gazing on the face of a person who has seen some object of horror. The improbability of the events, the abruptness and monotony in the *Inferno*, are excessive: but the interest never flags, from the continued earnestness of the author's mind. Dante's great power is in combining internal feelings with external objects. Thus, the gate of hell, on which that withering inscription is written, seems to be endowed with speech and consciousness, and to utter its dread warning, not without a sense of mortal woes. This author habitually unites the absolutely local and individual with the greatest wildness and mysticism. In the midst of the obscure and shadowy regions of the lower world, a tomb suddenly rises up with the inscription, 'I am the tomb of Pope Anastasius the Sixth'; and half the personages whom he has crowded into the *Inferno* are his own acquaintance. All this, perhaps, tends to heighten the effect by the bold intermixture of realities, and by an appeal, as it were, to the individual knowledge and experience of the reader. He affords few subjects for picture. There is, indeed, one gigantic one, that of Count Ugolino, of which Michael Angelo made a bas-

relief, and which Sir Joshua Reynolds ought not to have painted.

Another writer whom I shall mention last, and whom I cannot persuade myself to think a mere modern in the ground-work, is Ossian. He is a feeling and a name that can never be destroyed in the minds of his readers. As Homer is the first vigour and lustihead, Ossian is the decay and old age of poetry. He lives only in the recollection and regret of the past. There is one impression which he conveys more entirely than other poets, namely, the sense of privation, the loss of all things, of friends, of good name, of country—he is even without God in the world. He converses only with the spirits of the departed; with the motionless and silent clouds. The cold moonlight sheds its faint lustre on his head; the fox peeps out of his ruined tower; the thistle waves its beard to the wandering gale; and the strings of his harp seem, as the hand of age, as the tale of other times, passes over them, to sigh and rustle like the dry reeds in the winter's wind! The feeling of cheerless desolation, of the loss of the pith and sap of existence, of the annihilation of the substance, and the clinging to the shadow of all things as in a mock embrace, is here perfect. In this way, the lamentation of Selma for the loss of Salgar is the finest of all. If it were indeed possible to shew that this writer was nothing, it would only be another instance of mutability, another blank made, another void left in the heart, another confirmation of that feeling which makes him so often complain, 'Roll on ye dark, brown years, ye bring no joy on your wing to Ossian!'

LECTURE II

ON CHAUCER AND SPENSER

HAVING, in the former lecture, given some account of the nature of poetry in general, I shall proceed in the next place to a more particular consideration of the genius and history of English poetry. I shall take as the subject of the present lecture, Chaucer and Spenser, two out of four of the greatest names in poetry which this country has to boast. Both of them, however, were much indebted to the early poets of Italy, and may be considered as belonging in a certain degree to the same school. The freedom and copiousness with which our most original writers in former periods availed themselves of the productions of their predecessors, frequently transcribing whole passages without scruple or acknowledgement, may appear contrary to the etiquette of modern literature, when the whole stock of poetical common-places has become public property, and no one is compelled to trade upon any particular author. But it is not so much a subject of wonder at a time when to read and write was of itself an honorary distinction, when learning was almost as great a rarity as genius, and when, in fact, those who first transplanted the beauties of other languages

into their own might be considered as public benefactors, and the founders of a national literature. There are poets older than Chaucer, and in the interval between him and Spenser; but their genius was not such as to place them in any point of comparison with either of these celebrated men; and an inquiry into their particular merits or defects might seem rather to belong to the province of the antiquary than be thought generally interesting to the lovers of poetry in the present day.

Chaucer (who has been very properly considered as the father of English poetry) preceded Spenser by two centuries. He is supposed to have been born in London, in the year 1328, during the reign of Edward III., and to have died in 1400, at the age of seventy-two. He received a learned education at one, or at both, of the Universities, and travelled early into Italy, where he became thoroughly imbued with the spirit and excellence of the great Italian poets and prose-writers, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio; and is said to have had a personal interview with one of these, Petrarch. He was connected by marriage with the famous John of Gaunt, through whose interest he was introduced into several public employments. Chaucer was an active partisan, a religious reformer, and, from the share he took in some disturbances on one occasion, he was obliged to fly the country. On his return, he was imprisoned, and made his peace with government, as it is said, by a discovery of his associates. *Fortitude* does not appear at any time to have been the distinguishing virtue of poets. There is, how-

ever, an obvious similarity between the practical turn of Chaucer's mind, and restless impatience of his character, and the tone of his writings. Yet it would be too much to attribute the one to the other as cause and effect: for Spenser, whose poetical temparement was as effeminate as Chaucer's was stern and masculine, was equally engaged in public affairs, and had mixed equally in the great world. So much does native disposition predominate over accidental circumstances, moulding them to its previous bent and purposes! For, while Chaucer's intercourse with the busy world, and collision with the actual passions and conflicting interests of others, seemed to brace the sinews of his understanding, and gave to his writings the air of a man who describes persons and things that he had known and been intimately concerned in; the same opportunities, operating on a differently constituted frame, only served to alienate Spenser's mind the more from the 'close pent-up' scenes of ordinary life, and to make him 'rive their concealing continents', to give himself up to the unrestrained indulgence of 'flowery tenderness'.

It is not possible for any two writers to be more opposite in this respect. Spenser delighted in luxurious enjoyment; Chaucer, in severe activity of mind. As Spenser was the most romantic and visionary, Chaucer was the most practical of all the great poets, the most a man of business and the world. His poetry reads like history. Everything has a down-right reality, at least in the relator's mind. A simile, or a sentiment, is as if it were given in upon

evidence. Thus he describes Cressid's first avowal of her love:

And as the new abashed nightingale,
That stinteth first when she beginneth sing,
When that she heareth any herde's tale,
Or in the hedges any wight stirring,
And after, sicker, doth her voice outring;
Right so Cresseide, when that her dread stent,
Open'd her heart, and told him her intent.

This is so true, and natural, and beautifully simple, that the two things seem identified with each other. Again, it is said in the *Knight's Tale*,

Thus passeth yere by yere, and day by day,
Till it felle ones in a morwe of May,
That Emelie that fayrer was to sene
Than is the lilie upon his stalke grene;
And fresher than the May with floures newe,
For with the rose-colour strof hire hewe:
I n'ot which was the finer of hem two.

This scrupulousness about the literal preference, as if some question of matter of fact was at issue, is remarkable. I might mention that other, where he compares the meeting between Palamon and Arcite to a hunter waiting for a lion in a gap;

That stondeth at a gap with a spere,
Whan hunted is the lion or the bere,
And hereth him come rushing in the greves,
And breking bothe the boughes and the leves:

or that still finer one of Constance, when she is condemned to death:

Have ye not seen sometime a pale face
(Among a press) of him that hath been lad

Toward his deth, whereas he geteth no grace,
And swiche a colour in his face hath had,
Men mighten know him that was so bestad,
Amonges all the faces in that route.
So stant Custance, and loketh hire aboute.

The beauty, the pathos, here does not seem to be of the poet's seeking, but a part of the necessary texture of the fable. He speaks of what he wishes to describe with the accuracy, the discrimination, of one who relates what has happened to himself, or has had the best information from those who have been eye-witnesses of it. The strokes of his pencil always tell. He dwells only on the essential, on that which would be interesting to the persons really concerned: yet, as he never omits any material circumstance, he is prolix from the number of points on which he touches, without being diffuse on any one; and is sometimes tedious from the fidelity with which he adheres to his subject, as other writers are from the frequency of their digressions from it. The chain of his story is composed of a number of fine links closely connected together, and rivetted by a single blow. There is an instance of the minuteness which he introduces into his most serious descriptions in his account of Palamon when left alone in his cell:

Swiche sorrow he maketh that the grete tour
Resounded of his yelling and clamour:
The pure fetters on his shinnes grete
Were of his bitter salte teres wete.

The mention of this last circumstance looks like a part of the instructions he had to follow, which he had no discretionary power to leave

out or introduce at pleasure. He is contented to find grace and beauty in truth. He exhibits for the most part the naked object, with little drapery thrown over it. His metaphors, which are few, are not for ornament, but use, and as like as possible to the things themselves. He does not affect to shew his power over the reader's mind, but the power which his subject has over his own. The readers of Chaucer's poetry feel more nearly what the persons he describes must have felt than perhaps those of any other poet. His sentiments are not voluntary effusions of the poet's fancy, but founded on the natural impulses and habitual prejudices of the characters he has to represent. There is an inveteracy of purpose, a sincerity of feeling, which never relaxes or grows vapid, in whatever they do or say. There is no artificial, pompous display, but a strict parsimony of the poet's materials, like the rude simplicity of the age in which he lived. His poetry resembles the root just springing from the ground, rather than the full-blown flower. His muse is no 'babbling gossip of the air', fluent and redundant; but like a stammerer, or a dumb person, that has just found the use of speech, crowds many things together with eager haste, with anxious pauses, and fond repetitions, to prevent mistake. His words point as an index to the objects, like the eye or finger. There were none of the common-places of poetic diction in our author's time, no reflected lights of fancy, no borrowed roseate tints; he was obliged to inspect things for himself, to look narrowly, and almost to handle the object, as in the

obscurity of morning, we partly see, and partly grope our way; so that his descriptions have a sort of tangible character belonging to them, and produce the effect of sculpture on the mind. Chaucer had an equal eye for truth of nature and discrimination of character; and his interest in what he saw gave new distinctness and force to his power of observation. The picturesque and the dramatic are in him closely blended together, and hardly distinguishable; for he principally describes external appearances as indicating character, as symbols of internal sentiment. There is a meaning in what he sees; and it is this which catches his eye by sympathy. Thus the costume and dress of the Canterbury Pilgrims—of the Knight—the Squire—the Oxford Scholar—the Gap-toothed Wife of Bath, and the rest, speak for themselves. To take one or two of these at random:

There was also a Nonne, a Prioresse,
 That of hire smiling was ful simple and coy;
 Hire gretest othe n'as but by seint Eloy:
 And she was cleped Madame Eglentine.
 Ful wel she sange the service divine
 Entuned in hire nose ful swetely;
And Frenche she spake ful farye and fetisly,
After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,
 For Frenche of Paris was to hire unknowe.
 At mete was she wel ytaughte withalle;
 She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,
 Ne wette hire fingres in hire sauce depe.

* * *

And sikerly she was of great disport,
 And ful pleasant, and amiable of port,
 And peined hire to contrefeten chere
 Of court, and ben estatelich of manere,
 And to ben holden digne of reverence.
 But for to speken of hire conscience,

She was so charitable and so pitous,
 She wolde wepe if that she saw a mous
 Caughte in a trappe, if it were ded or bledde,
 Of smale houndes hadde she, that she fedde
 With rosted flesh, and milk, and wastel brēde,
 But sore wept she if on of hem were dede,
 Or if men smote it with a yerde smert:
 And all was conscience and tendre herte.

Full semely hire wimple ypinched was;
 Hire nose tretis; hire eyen grey as glas;
 Hire mouth ful smale: and therto soft and red;
 But sickerly she hadde a fayre forehed.
 It was almost a spanne brode, I trowe.

* * *

A monk there was, a fayre for the maistrie,
 An out-rider, that loved venerie:
 A manly man, to ben an Abbot able.
 Ful many a deinte hors hadde he in stable:
 And whan he rode, men mighte his bridel here,
 Gingeling in a whistling wind as clere,
 And eke as loude, as doth the chapell belle,
 Ther as this lord was keper of the celle.

The reule of Seint Maure and of Seint Beneit,
 Because that it was olde and somdele streit,
 This ilke monk lette olde thinges pace,
 And held after the newe world the trace.
 He yave not of the text a pulled hen,
 That saith, that hunters ben not holy men;—
 Therefore he was a prickasoure a right:
 Greihoundes he hadde as swift as foul of flight:
 Of pricking and of hunting for the hare
 Was all his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.

I saw his sleeves purfled at the hond
 With gris, and that the finest of the lond.
 And for to fasten his hood under his chinne,
 He had of gold ywrought a curious pinne:
 A love-knotte in the greter end ther was.
 His hed was balled, and shone as any glas,
 And eke his face, as it hadde ben anoint.
 He was a lord ful fat and in good point.
 His eyen stepe, and rolling in his hed,
 That stemed as a forneis of a led.
 His botes souple, his hors in gret estat,
 Now certainly he was a fayre prelat.

He was not pale as a forpined gost.
 A fat swan loved he best of any rost.
 His palfrey was as browne as is a berry.

The Serjeant-at-law is the same identical individual as Lawyer Dowling in *Tom Jones*, who wished to divide himself into a hundred pieces, to be in a hundred places at once.

No wher so besy a man as he ther n'as,
 And yet he semed besier than he was.

The Frankelein, in 'whose hous it snewed of mete and drinke', the Shipman, 'who rode upon a rouncie, as he couthe', the Doctour of Phisike, 'whose studie was but litel of the Bible'; the Wif of Bath, in

All whose parish ther was non,
 That to the offring before hire shulde gon,
 And if ther did, certain so wroth was she,
 That she was out of alle charitee;

—the poure Persone of a toun, 'whose parish was wide, and houses fer asonder'; the Miller, and the reve, 'a slendre colerike man', are all of the same stamp. They are every one samples of a kind; abstract definitions of a species. Chaucer, it has been said, numbered the classes of men, as Linnæus numbered the plants. Most of them remain to this day: others, that are obsolete, and may well be dispensed with, still live in his descriptions of them. Such is the Sompnoure: ?

A Sompnoure was ther with us in that place,
 That hadde a fire-red cherubinnes face,
 For sausefleme he was, with eyen narwe,
 As hote he was, and likerous as a sparwe,

With scalled browes blake, and pilled berd
 Of his visage children were sore aferd.
 Ther n'as quicksilver, litarge, ne brimston,
 Boras, ceruse, ne oile of tartre non,
 Ne oinement that wolde clense or bite,
 That him might helpen of his whelkes white,
 Ne of the knobbes sitting on his chekes.
 Wel loved he garlike, onions, and lekes,
 And for to drinke strong win as rede as blood.
 Than wolde he speke, and crie as he were wood.
 And whan that he well dronken had the win,
 Than wold he speken no word but Latin.
 A fewe termes coude he, two or three,
 That he had lerned out of som decree;
 No wonder is, he heard it all the day.
 In danger hadde he at his owen gise
 The yonge girles of the diocise,
 And knew hir conseil, and was of hir rede.
 A gerlond hadde he sette upon his hede
 As gret as it were for an alestake:
 A bokeler hadde he made him of a cake.
 With him ther rode a gentil Pardonere—
 That hadde a vois as smale as hath a gote.

It would be a curious speculation (at least for those who think that the characters of men never change, though manners, opinions, and institutions may,) to know what has become of this character of the Sompnoure in the present day; whether or not it has any technical representative in existing professions; into what channels and conduits it has withdrawn itself, where it lurks unseen in cunning obscurity, or else shews its face boldly, pampered into all the insolence of office, in some other shape, as it is deterred or encouraged by circumstances. *Chaucer's characters modernized*, upon this principle of historic derivation, would be a useful addition to our knowledge of human nature. But who is there to undertake it?

The descriptions of the equipage and accoutrements of the two kings of Thrace and Inde, in the *Knight's Tale*, are as striking and grand as the others are lively and natural:

Ther maist thou se coming with Palamon
Licurge himself, the grete king of Trace:
Blake was his berd, and manly was his face,
The cercles of his eyen in his hed
They gloweden betwixen yelwe and red,
And like a griffon loked he about,
With kemped heres on his browes stout;
His limmes gret, his braunes hard and stronge,
His shouldres brode, his armes round and longe.
And, as the guise was in his contree,
Ful highe upon a char of gold stood he,
With foure white bolles in the trais.
Instede of cote-armure on his harnais,
With nayles yelwe, and bright as any gold,
He hadde a beres skin, cole-blake for old.
His longe here was kempte behind his bak,
As any ravenes fether it shone for blake.
A wreth of gold arm-gret, of huge weight,
Upon his hed sate full of stones bright,
Of fine rubins and of diamants.
About his char ther wenten white alauns,
Twenty and mo, as great as any stere,
To hunten at the leon or the dere,
And folwed him, with mosel fast ybound.

With Arcite, in stories as men find,
The grete Emetrius, the king of Inde,
Upon a stede bay, trapped in stele,
Covered with cloth of gold diapred wele,
Came riding like the god of armes, Mars.
His cote-armure was of a cloth of Tars,
Couched with perles, white, and round and grete.
His sadel was of brent gold new ybete;
A mantelet upon his shouldres hanging
Bret-ful of rubies red, as fire sparkling.
His criske here like ringes was yronne,
And that was yelwe, and glittered as the Sonne.
His nose was high, his eyen bright citrin,
His lippes round, his colour was sanguin,
A fewe fraknes in his face yspreint,

Betwixen yelwe and blake somdel ymeint.
And as a leon he his loking caste.
Of five-and-twenty yere his age I caste.
His berd was wel begonnen for to spring;
His vois was a trompe thundering.
Upon his hed he wered of laurer grene
A gerlond freshe and lusty for to sene.
Upon his hond he bare, for his deduit,
As egle tame, as any lily whit.—
About this king ther ran on every part
Ful many a tame leon and leopart.

What a deal of terrible beauty there is contained in this description! The imagination of a poet brings such objects before us as when we look at wild beasts in a menagerie; their claws are pared, their eyes glitter like harmless lightning; but we gaze at them with a pleasing awe, clothed in beauty, formidable in the sense of abstract power.

Chaucer's descriptions of natural scenery possess the same sort of characteristic excellence, or what might be termed *gusto*. They have a local truth and freshness, which gives the very feeling of the air, the coolness or moisture of the ground. Inanimate objects are thus made to have a fellow-feeling in the interest of the story, and render back the sentiment of the speaker's mind. One of the finest parts of Chaucer is of this mixed kind. It is the beginning of *The Flower and the Leaf*, where he describes the delight of that young beauty, shrouded in her bower, and listening in the morning of the year to the singing of the nightingale; while her joy rises with the rising song, and gushes out afresh at every pause, and is borne along with the full tide of pleasure, and still increases, and repeats, and

prolongs itself, and knows no ebb. The coolness of the harbour, its retirement, the early time of the day, the sudden starting up of the birds in the neighbouring bushes, the eager delight with which they devour and rend the opening buds and flowers, are expressed with a truth and feeling which make the whole appear like the recollecton of an actual scene:

Which as me thought was right a pleasing sight,
And eke the briddes song for to here,
Would haue rejoyced any earthly wight,
And I that couth not yet in no manere
Heare the nightingale of all the yeare,
Ful busily herkened with herte and with eare,
If I her voice perceiue coud any where.

And I that all this pleasaunt sight sie,
Thought sodainly I felt so sweet an aire
Of the eglentere, that certainly
There is no herte I deme in such dispaire,
Ne with thoughts froward and contraire,
So ouerlaid, but it should soone haue bote,
If it had ones felt this savour sote.

And as I stood and cast aside mine eie,
I was ware of the fairest medler tree
That ever yet in all my life I sie
As full of blossomes as it might be,
Therein a goldfinch, leaping pretile
Fro bough to bough, and as him list he eet
Here and there of buds and floures sweet.

And to the herber side was joyning
This faire tree, of which I haue you told,
And at the last the brid began to sing,
Whan he had eaten what he eat wold,
So passing sweetly, that by manifold
It was more pleasaunt than I coud deuise
And whan his song was ended in this wise.

The nightingale with so merry a note
Answered him that all the wood rong

So sodainly, that as it were a sote,
I stood astonied, so was I with the song
Thorow rauished, that til late and long,
I ne wist in what place I was, ne where,
And ayen me thought she song euen by mine ere.

Wherefore I waited about busily
On every side, if I her might see,
And at the last I gan full well aspie
Where she sat in a fresh grene laurer tree,
On the further side euen right by me,
That gaue so passing a delicious smell,
According to the eglentere full well.

Whereof I had so inly great pleasure,
That as me thought I surely rauished was
Into Paradise, where my desire
Was for to be, and no ferther passe
As for that day, and on the sote grasse
I sat me downe, for as for mine entent,
The birds' song was more conuenient.

And more pleasaunt to me, by manifold,
Than meat or drinke, or any other thing,
Thereto the herber was so fresh and cold,
The wholesome sauours eke so comforting,
That, as I demed, sith the beginning
Of the world was neuer seene or than
So pleasaunt a ground of none earthly man.

And as I sat the birds harkening thus,
Me thought that I heard voices sodainly
The most sweetest and most delicious
That euer any wight I trow truly
Heard in their life, for the armony
And sweet accorde was in so good musike,
That the uoice to angels was most like.

There is here no affected rapture, no flowery sentiment; the whole is an ebullition of natural delight 'welling out of the heart', like water from a crystal spring. Nature is the soul of art; there is a strength as well as a simplicity in the imagination, that reposes entirely on

nature, that nothing else can supply. It was the same trust in nature, and reliance on his subject, which enabled Chaucer to describe the grief and patience of Griselda; the faith of Constance; and the heroic perseverance of the little child, who, going to school through the streets of Jewry,

Oh *Alma Redemptoris mater*, loudly sung,

and who after his death still triumphed in his song. Chaucer has more of this deep, internal, sustained sentiment than any other writer except Boccacio. In depth of simple pathos, and intensity of conception, never swerving from his subject, I think no other writer comes near him, not even the Greek tragedians. I wish to be allowed to give one or two instances of what I mean. I will take the following from *The Knight's Tale*. The distress of Arcite, in consequence of his banishment from his love, is thus described:

Whan that Arcite to Thebes comen was,
Ful oft a day he swelt and said Alas,
For sene his lady shall he never mo.
And shortly to concluden all his wo,
So mochel sorwe hadde never creature,
That is or shall be, while the world may dure.
His slepe, his mete, his drinke is him byraft.
That lene he wex, and drie as in a shaft
His eyen holwe, and grisly to behold,
His hewe salwe, and pale as ashen cold,
And solitary he was, and ever alone,
And wailing all the night, making his mone.
And if he herde song or instrument,
Than wold he wepe, he mighte not be stent.
So feble were his spirites, and so low,
And changed so that no man coude know
His speche, ne his vois, though men it herd.

This picture of the sinking of the heart, of the wasting away of the body and mind, of the gradual failure of all the faculties under the contagion of a rankling sorrow, cannot be surpassed. Of the same kind is his farewell to his mistress, after he has gained her hand and lost his life in the combat:

Alas the wol! alas the peines stronge,
That I for you have suffered, and so longe!
Alas the deth! alas min Emilie!
Alas departing of our compaignie;
Alas min hertes quene! alas my wif!
Min hertes ladie, ender of my lif!
What is this world? what axen men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Alone withouten any compaignie.

The death of Arcite is the more affecting as it comes after triumph and victory, after the pomp of sacrifice, the solemnities of prayer, the celebration of the gorgeous rites of chivalry. The descriptions of the three temples of Mars, of Venus, and Diana, of the ornaments and ceremonies used in each, with the reception given to the offerings of the lovers, have a beauty and grandeur, much of which is lost in Dryden's version. For instance, such lines as the following are not rendered with their true feeling:

Why shulde I not as well eke tell you all
The purtreiture that was upon the wall
Within the temple of mighty Mars the rede—
That highte the gret temple of Mars in Trace
In thilke colde and frosty region,
Ther as Mars hath his soveraine mansion.
First on the wall was peinted a forest,
In which ther wonneth neyther man ne best,
With knotty knarry barrein trees old
Of stubbes sharpe and hidous to behold;
In which ther ran a romble and a swough,
As though a storm shuld bresten every bough.

And again, among innumerable terrific images of death and slaughter painted on the wall, is this one :

The statue of Mars upon a carte stood
Armed, and looked grim as he were wood.
A wolf ther stood beforne him at his fete
With eyen red, and of a man he ete.

The story of Griselda is in Boccaccio; but the Clerk of Oxenforde, who tells it, professes to have learned in from Petrarch. This story has gone all over Europe, and has passed into a proverb. In spite of the barbarity of the circumstances, which are abominable, the sentiment remains unimpaired and unalterable. It is of that kind 'that heaves no sigh, that sheds no tear'; but it hangs upon the beatings of the heart; it is a part of the very being; it is as inseparable from it as the breath we draw. It is still and calm as the face of death. Nothing can touch it in its ethereal purity: tender as the yielding flower, it is fixed as the marble firmament. The only remonstrance she makes, the only complaint she utters against all the ill-treatment she receives, is that single line where, when turned back naked to her father's house, she says:

Let me not like a worm go by the way.

The first outline given of the character is inimitable :

Nought fer fro thilke paleis honourable,
Wher as this markis shope his marriage,
Ther stood a thorpe, of sighte delitable,
In which that poure folk of that village
Hadden hir bestes and hir herbergage,
And of hir labour toke hir sustenance,
After that the erthe yave hem habundance.

Among this poure folk ther dwelt a man,
Which that was holden pourest of hem all:
But highe God sometime senden can
His grace unto a litel oxes stall:
Janicola men of that thorpe him call.
A doughter had he, faire ynough to sight,
And Grisildis this yonge maiden hight.

But for to speke of virtuous beautee,
Than was she on the fairest under Sonne:
Ful pourely yfostred up was she:
No likerous lust was in hire herte yronne;
Ful offer of the well than of the tonne
She dranke, and for she wolde vertue plesse,
She knew wel labour, but non idel ese.

But though this mayden tendre were of age,
Yet in the brest of hire virginitee
Ther was enclosed sad and ripe corage:
And in gret reverence and charitee
Hire olde poure fader fostred she:
A few sheep spinning on the feld she kept,
She wolde not ben idel til she slept.

And whan she homward came she wolde bring
Wortes and other herbes times oft,
The which she shred and sethe for hire living,
And made hire bed ful hard, and nothing soft:
And ay she kept hire fadres lif on loft
With every obeisance and diligence,
That child may don to fadres reverence.

Upon Grisilde, this poure creature,
Ful often sithe this markis sette his eye,
As he on hunting rode peraventure:
And whan it felle that he might hire espie,
He not with wonton lokynge of folie
His eyen cast on hire, but in sad wise
Upon hire chere he wold him oft avise.

Commending in his herte hire womanhede
And eke hire vertue, passing any wight
Of so yong age, as wel in chere as dede,
For though the people have no gret insight
In vertue, he considered ful right
Hire bountee, and disposed that he wold
Wedde hire only, if ever he wedden shold.

Grisilde of this (God wot) ful innocent,
That for hire shapen was all this array.
To fetchen water at a welle is went,
And cometh home as sone as ever she may.
For wel she had heard say that thilke day
The markis shulde wedde, and, if she might,
She wolde fayn han seen som of that sight.

She thought, 'I wol with other maidens stond,
That ben my felawes, in our dore, and see
The markisesse, and thereto wol I fond
To don at home, as sone as it may be,
The labour which longeth unto me,
And than I may at leiser hire behold,
If she this way unto the castel hold.'

And she wolde over the threswold go
The markis came and gan hire for to call,
And she set doun her water-pot anon
Beside the threswold in an oxes stall,
And doun upon hire knees she gan to fall.
And with sad countenance kneleth still,
Till she had heard what was the lordes will.

The story of the little child slain in Jewry, (which is told by the Prioress, and worthy to be told by her who was 'all conscience and tender heart'), is not less touching than that of Griselda. It is simple and heroic to the last degree. The poetry of Chaucer has a religious sanctity about it connected with the manners and superstitions of the age. It has all the spirit of martyrdom.

It has also all the extravagance and the utmost licentiousness of comic humour, equally arising out of the manners of the time. In this, too, Chaucer resembled Boccaccio, that he excelled in both styles, and could pass at will, 'from grave to gay, from lively to severe', but he never confounded the two styles together (ex-

cept from that involuntary and unconscious mixture of the pathetic and humorous which is almost always to be found in nature,) and was exclusively taken up with what he set about, whether it was jest or earnest. The *Wife of Bath's Prologue* (which Pope has very admirably modernised) is, perhaps, unequalled as a comic story. The *Cock and the Fox* is also excellent for lively strokes of character and satire. *January and May* is not so good as some of the others. Chaucer's versification, considering the time at which he wrote, and that versification is a thing in a great degree mechanical, is not one of his least merits. It has considerable strength and harmony, and its apparent deficiency in the latter respect arises chiefly from the alterations which have since taken place in the pronunciation or mode of accenting the words of the language. The best general rule for reading him is to pronounce the final *e*, as in reading Italian.

It was observed in the last lecture, that painting describes what the object is in itself, poetry what it implies or suggests. Chaucer's poetry is not, in general, the best confirmation of the truth of this distinction, for his poetry is more picturesque and historical than almost any other. But there is one instance in point which I cannot help giving in this place. It is the story of the three thieves, who go in search of Death to kill him, and who, meeting with him, are entangled in their fate by his words, without knowing him. In the printed catalogue to Mr West's (in some respects very admirable) picture of 'Death on the Pale Horse',

it is observed, that 'In poetry the same effect is produced by a few abrupt and rapid gleams of description, touching, as it were with fire, the features and edges of a general mass of awful obscurity; but in painting, such indistinctness would be a defect, and imply that the artist wanted the power to pourtray the conceptions of his fancy. Mr West was of opinion, that to delineate a physical form, which in its moral impression would approximate to that of the visionary Death, of Milton, it was necessary to endow it, if possible, with the appearance of super-human strength and energy. He has therefore exerted the utmost force and perspicuity of his pencil on the central figure'. —One might suppose from this, that the way to represent a shadow was to make it as substantial as possible. Oh, no! Painting has its prerogatives (and high ones they are), but they lie in representing the visible, not the invisible. The moral attributes of Death are powers and effects of an infinitely wide and general description, which no individual or physical form can possibly represent but by a courtesy of speech, or by a distant analogy. The moral impression of Death is essentially visionary; its reality is in the mind's eye. Words are here the only *things*; and things, physical forms, the mere mockeries of the understanding. The less definite, the less bodily the conception, the more vast, unformed, and unsubstantial, the nearer does it approach to some resemblance of that omnipresent, lasting, universal, irresistible principle, which everywhere, and at some time or other, exerts its power over all things.

Death is a mighty abstraction, like Night, or Space, or Time. He is an ugly customer, who will not be invited to supper, or to sit for his picture. He is with us and about us, but we do not see him. He stalks on before us, and we do not mind him: he follows us close behind, and we do not turn to look back at him. We do not see him making faces at us in our life-time, nor perceive him afterwards sitting in mock-majesty, a twin-skeleton, beside us, tickling our bare ribs, and staring into our hollow eye-balls! Chaucer knew this. He makes three riotous companions go in search of Death to kill him, they meet with an old man whom they reproach with his age, and ask why he does not die, to which he answers thus:

Ne Deth, alas! ne will not han my lif.
 Thus walke I like a restless caitiff,
 And on the ground, which is my modres gate,
 I knocke with my staf, erlich and late,
 And say to hire, 'Leve mother, let me in.
 Lo, how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin,
 Alas! when shall my bones ben at reste?
 Mother, with you wolde I changen my cheste,
 That in my chambre longe time hath be,
 Ye, for an heren cloute to wrap in me.'
 But yet to me she will not don that grace.
 For which ful pale and welked is my face.

They then ask the old man where they shall find out Death, to kill him, and he sends them on an errand which ends in the death of all three. We hear no more of him, but it is Death that they have encountered.

The interval between Chaucer and Spenser is long and dreary. There is nothing to fill

up the chasm but the names of Occleve, 'Ancient Gower', Lydgate, Wyatt, Surrey, and Sackville. Spenser flourished in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was sent with Sir John Davies into Ireland, of which he has left behind him some tender recollections, in his description of the bog of Allan, and a record in an ably written paper, containing observations on the state of that country, and the means of improving it, which remain in full force to the present day. Spenser died at an obscure inn in London, it is supposed in distressed circumstances. The treatment he received from Burleigh is well known. Spenser, as well as Chaucer, was engaged in active life; but the genius of his poetry was not active: it is inspired by the love of ease, and relaxation from all the cares and business of life. Of all the poets, he is the most poetical. Though much later than Chaucer, his obligations to preceding writers were less. He has in some measure borrowed the plan of his poem (as a number of distinct narratives) from Ariosto; but he has engrafted upon it an exuberance of fancy, and an endless voluptuousness of sentiment, which are not to be found in the Italian writer. Farther, Spenser is even more of an inventor in the subject-matter. There is an originality, richness, and variety in his allegorical personages and fictions, which almost vies with the splendour of the ancient mythology. If Ariosto transports us into the regions of romance, Spenser's poetry is all fairy-land. In Ariosto, we walk upon the ground, in company, gay, fantastic, and adventurous enough. In Spenser, we wander in another

world, among ideal beings. The poet takes and lays us in the lap of a lovelier nature, by the sound of softer streams, among greener hills and fairer valleys. He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it; and fulfils the delightful promise of our youth. He waves his wand of enchantment—and at once embodies airy beings, and throws a delicious veil over all actual objects. The two worlds of reality and of fiction are poised on the wings of his imagination. His ideas, indeed, seem more distinct than his perceptions. He is the painter of abstractions, and describes them with dazzling minuteness. In the mask of Cupid he makes the god of love ‘clap on high his coloured wings *twain*’; and it is said of Gluttony, in the Procession of the Passions,

In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad.

At times he becomes picturesque from his intense love of beauty; as where he compares Prince Arthur’s crest to the appearance of the almond tree:

Upon the top of all his lofty crest,
 A bunch of hairs discolour’d diversely
 With sprinkled pearl and gold full richly drest,
 Did shake and seem’d to daunce for jollity;
 Like to an almond tree ymounted high
 On top of green Selenis all alone,
 With blossoms brave bedecked daintily;
 Her tender locks do tremble every one
 At every little breath that under heav’n is blown.

The love of beauty, however, and not of truth, is the moving principle of his mind; and he is guided in his fantastic delineations by no rule but the impulse of an inexhaustible imagination.

He luxuriates equally in scenes of Eastern magnificence, or the still solitude of a hermit's cell—in the extremes of sensuality, or refinement.

In reading the *Faery Queen*, you see a little withered old man by a wood-side opening a wicket, a giant, and a dwarf lagging far behind, a damsel in a boat upon an enchanted lake, wood-nymphs, and satyrs; and all of a sudden you are transported into a lofty palace, with tapers burning, amidst knights and ladies, with dance and revelry, and song, 'and mask, and antique pageantry'. What can be more solitary, more shut up in itself, than his description of the house of Sleep, to which Archimago sends for a dream:

And, more to lull him in his slumber soft,
 A trickling stream from high rock tumbling down,
 And ever-drizzling rain upon the loft,
 Mix'd with a murmuring wind, much like the sound
 Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swoond.
 No other noise, nor people's troublous cries,
 That still are wont t' annoy the walled town,
 Might there be heard; but careless quiet lies
 Wrapt in eternal silence, far from enemies.

It is as if 'the honey-heavy dew of slumber' had settled on his pen in writing these lines. How different in the subject (and yet how like in beauty) is the following description of the Bower of Bliss:

Eftsoones they heard a most melodious sound
 Of all that mote delight a dainty ear;
 Such as at once might not on living ground,
 Save in this Paradise, be heard elsewhere:
 Right hard it was for wight which did it hear
 To tell what manner musicke that mote be;
 For all that pleasing is to living eare
 Was there consorted in one harmonie;
 Birds, voices, instruments, windes, waters, all agree,

The joyous birdes shrouded in chearefull shade
 Their notes unto the voice attempred sweet
 The angelical soft trembling voices made
 To th' instruments divine response meet.
 The silver sounding instruments did meet
 With the base murmur of the water's fall;
 The water's fall with difference discreet,
 Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;
 The gentle warbling wind low answered to all.

The remainder of the passage has all that voluptuous pathos, and languid brilliancy of fancy, in which this writer excelled:

The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay;
 Ah! see, whoso fayre thing dost fain to see,
 In springing flower the image of thy day!
 Ah! see the virgin rose, how sweetly she
 Doth first peep forth with bashful modesty.
 That fairer seems the less ye see her may!
 Lo! see soon after how more bold and free
 Her bared bosom she doth broad display;
 Lo! see soon after, how she fades and falls away!
 So passeth in the passing of a day
 Of mortal life the leaf, the bud, the flower;
 Ne more doth flourish after first decay,
 That erst was sought, to deck both bed and bower
 Of many a lady, and many a paramour!
 Gather therefore the rose whilst yet is prime,
 For soon comes age that will her pride deflower;
 Gather the rose of love whilst yet is time,
 Whilst loving thou mayest loved be with equal crime*.
 He ceased; and then gan all the quire of birds
 Their divers notes to attune unto his lay,
 As in approvance of his pleasing wordes.
 The constant pair heard all that he did say,
 Yet swerved not, but kept their forward way
 Through many covert groves and thickets close,
 In which they creeping did at last display†
 That wanton lady with her lover loose,
 Whose sleepy head she in her lap did soft dispose.

* Taken from Tasso.

† This word is an instance of those unwarrantable freedoms which Spenser sometimes took with language.

Upon a bed of roses she was laid,
 As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin;
 And was arrayed, or rather disarrayed,
 All in a veil of silk and silver thin,
 That hid no whit her alabaster skin,
 But rather shewed more white, if more might be:
 More subtle web Arachne cannot spin;
 Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
 Of scorched dew, do not in the air more lightly flee.

Her snowy breast was bare to greedy spoil
 Of hungry eyes which n' ote therewith be fill'd,
 And yet through languor of her late sweet toil
 Few drops more clear than nectar forth distill'd,
 That like pure Orient perles adown it trill'd;
 And her fair eyes sweet smiling in delight
 Moisten'd their fiery beams, with which she thrill'd
 Frail hearts, yet quenched not; like starry light,
 Which, sparkling on the silent waves, does seem more
 bright.

The finest things in Spenser are, the character of Una, in the first book; the House of Pride; the Cave of Mammon, and the Cave of Despair; the account of Memory, of whom it is said, among other things,

The wars he well remember'd of King Nine,
 Of old Assaracus and Inachus divine;

the description of Belphebe; the story of Florimel and the Witch's son; the Gardens of Adonis, and the Bower of Bliss; the Mask of Cupid; and Colin Clout's vision, in the last book. But some people will say that all this may be very fine, but that they cannot understand it on account of the allegory. They are afraid of the allegory as if they thought it would bite them: they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle. If they do not meddle with

the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain as a pike-staff. It might as well be pretended that we cannot see Poussin's pictures for the allegory, as that the allegory prevents us from understanding Spenser. For instance, when Britomart, seated amidst the young warriors, lets fall her hair and discovers her sex, is it necessary to know the part she plays in the allegory, to understand the beauty of the following stanza?

And eke that stranger knight amongst the rest
 Was for like need enforc'd to disarray,
 Tho' when as vailed was her lofty crest,
 Her golden locks that were in trammels gay
 Upbouden, did themselves adown display,
 And raught unto her heels like sunny beams
 That in a cloud their light did long time stay;
 Their vapour faded, shew their golden gleams,
 And through the persant air shoot forth their azure
 streams.

Or is there any mystery in what is said of Belphebe, that her hair was sprinkled with flowers and blossoms which had been entangled in it as she fled through the woods? Or is it necessary to have a more distinct idea of Proteus than that which is given of him in his boat, with the frightened Florimel at his feet, while

the cold icicles from his rough beard
 Dropped adown upon her snowy breast!

Or is it not a sufficient account of one of the sea-gods, that pass by them, to say

That was Arion crowned:—
 So went he playing on the watery plain.

Or to take the Procession of the Passions that draw the coach of Pride, in which the figures of Idleness, of Gluttony, of Lechery, of Avarice, of Envy, and of Wrath speak, one should think, plain enough for themselves; such as this of Gluttony:

And by his side rode loathsome Gluttony,
Deformed creature, on a filthy swine;
His belly was up blown with luxury;
And eke with fatness swollen were his eyne;
And like a crane his neck was long and fine,
With which he swallowed up excessive feast,
For want whereof poor people oft did pine.

In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad:
For other clothes he could not wear for heat;
And on his head an ivy garland had,
From under which fast trickled down the sweat:
Still, as he rode, he somewhat still did eat.
And in his hand did bear a bouzing can,
Of which he supt so oft that on his seat
His drunken corse he scarce upholden can;
In shape and size more like a monster than a man.

Or this of Lechery:

And next to him rode lustfull Lechery
Upon a bearded goat, whose rugged hair
And whaly eyes (the sign of jealousy)
Was like the person's self whom he did bear:
Who rough and black and filthy did appear.
Unseemly man to please fair lady's eye:
Yet he of ladies oft was loved dear,
When fairer faces were bid standen by:
O! who does know the bent of woman's fantasy?

In a green gown he clothed was full fair,
Which underneath did hide his filthiness;
And in his hand a burning heart he bare,
Full of vain follies and new fangleness;
For he was false and fraught with fickleness;

And learned had to love with secret looks;
 And well could dance; and sing with ruefulness;
 And fortunes tell; and read in loving books;
 And thousand other ways to bait his fleshly hooks.

Inconstant man that loved all he saw,
 And lusted after all that he did love;
 Ne would his looser life be tied to law;
 But joyed weak women's hearts to tempt and prove,
 If from their loyal loves he might them move.

This is pretty plain-spoken. Mr Southey says,
 of Spenser,

Yet not more sweet
 Than pure was he, and not more pure than wise;
 High priest of all the Muses' mysteries!

On the contrary, no one was more apt to pry
 into mysteries which do not strictly belong to
 the Muses.

Of the same kind with the Procession of the
 Passions, as little obscure, and still more beauti-
 ful, is the Mask of Cupid, with his train of
 votaries:

The first was Fancy, like a lovely boy
 Of rare aspect, and beauty without peer;

His garment neither was of silk nor say,
 But painted plumes in goodly order dight,
 Like as the sun-burnt Indians do array
 Their tawny bodies in their proudest plight;
 As those same plumes so seem'd he vain and light,
 That by his gait might easily appear;
 For still he far'd as dancing in delight,
 And in his hand a windy fan did bear
 That in the idle air he mov'd still here and there.

And him beside march'd amorous Desire,
 Who seem'd of riper years than the other swain,
 Yet was that other swain this elder's sire,
 And gave him being, common to them twain:

His garment was disguised very vain,
And his embroidered bonnet sat awry;
'Twixt both his hands few sparks he close did strain,
Which still he blew, and kindled busily,
That soon they life conceiv'd and forth in flames did fly.

Next after him went Doubt, who was yclad
In a discolour'd coat of strange disguise,
That at his back a broad capuccio had,
And sleeves dependant *Albanese-wise*;
He lookt askew with his mistrustful eyes,
And nicely trod, as thorns lay in his way,
Or that the floor to shrink he did avise;
And on a broken reed he still did stay
His feeble steps, which shrunk when hard thereon he lay.

With him went Daunger, cloth'd in ragged weed,
Made of bear's skin, that him more dreadful made:
Yet his own face was dreadful, ne did need
Strange horror to deform his grisly shade;
A net in th' one hand, and a rusty blade
In th' other was; this Mischiefe, that Mishap;
With th' one his foes he threat'ned to invade,
With th' other he his friends meant to enwrap;
For whom he could not kill he practiz'd to entrap.

Next him was Fear, all arm'd from top to toe,
Yet thought himselfe not safe enough thereby,
But fear'd each shadow moving to and fro;
And his own arms when glittering he did spy
Or clashing heard, he fast away did fly,
As ashes pale of hue, and winged-heel'd;
And evermore on Daunger fixt his eye,
'Gainst whom he always bent a brazen shield,
Which his right hand unarmed fearfully did wield.

With him went Hope in rank, a handsome maid,
Of chearfull look and lovely to behold;
In silken samite she was light array'd,
And her fair locks were woven up in gold;
She always smil'd, and in her hand did hold
An holy-water sprinkler dipt in dew,
With which she sprinkled favours manifold
On whom she list, and did great liking shew,
Great liking unto many, but true love to few.

Next after them, the winged God himself
 Came riding on a lion ravenous,
 Taught to obey the menage of that elfe
 That man and beast with power imperious
 Subdueth to his kingdom tyrannous:
 His biindfold eyes he bade awhile unbind;
 That his proud spoil of that same dolorous
 Fair dame he might behold in perfect kind;
 Which seen, he much rejoiced in his cruel mind.

Of which full proud, himself uprearing high,
 He looked round about with stern disdain,
 And did survey his goodly company:
 And, marshalling the evil-ordered train,
 With that the darts which his right hand did strain,
 Full dreadfully he shook, that all did quake,
 And clapt on high his colour'd winges twain,
 That all his many it afraid did make:
 Tho' blinding him again, his way he forth did take.

The description of Hope, in this series of historical portraits, is one of the most beautiful in Spenser: and the triumph of Cupid, at the mischief he has made, is worthy of the malicious urchin deity. In reading these descriptions, one can hardly avoid being reminded of Rubens's allegorical pictures; but the account of Satyrane's taming the lion's whelps and lugging the bear's cubs along in his arms while yet an infant, whom his mother so naturally, advises to 'go seek some other play-fellows', has even more of this high picturesque character. Nobody but Rubens could have painted the fancy of Spenser; and he could not have given the sentiment, the airy dream that hovers over it!

With all this, Spenser neither makes us laugh nor weep. The only jest in his poem is an allegorical play upon words, where he describes Malbecco as escaping in the herd of goats, 'by the help of his fayre horns on

hight'. Bnt he has been unjustly charged with a want of passion and of strength. He has both in an immense degree. He has not indeed the pathos of immediate action or suffering, which is more properly the dramatic; but he has all the pathos of sentiment and romance—all that belongs to distant objects of terror, and uncertain, imaginary distress. His strength, in like manner, is not strength of will or action, of bone and muscle, nor is it coarse and palpable—but it assumes a character of vastness and sublimity, seen through the same visionary medium, and blended with the appalling associations of preternatural agency. We need only turn, in proof of this, to the Cave of Despair, or the Cave of Mammon, or to the account of the change of Malbecco into Jealousy. The following stanzas, in the description of the Cave of Mammon, the grisly house of Plutus, are unrivalled for the portentous massiness of the forms, the splendid chiaro-scuro, and shadowy horror.

That house's form within was rude and strong,
 Like an huge cave hewn out of rocky clift,
 From whose rough vault the ragged breaches hung,
 Embossed with massy gold of glorious gift,
 And with rich metal loaded every rift,
 That heavy ruin they did seem to threat:
 And over them Arachne high did lift

Her cunning web, and spread her subtle net,
 Enwrapped in foul smoke, and clouds more black than jet.

But roof and floor, and walls were all of gold,
 Both overgrown with dust and old decay *.

* That all with one consent praise new-born gauds,
 Tho' they are made and moulded of things past,
 And give to Dust that is a little gilt,
 More laud than gold o'er-dusted.

Troilus and Cressida.

And hid in darkness that none could behold
 The hue thereof: for view of cheerful day
 Did never in that house itself display,
 But a faint shadow of uncertain light;
 Such as a lamp whose life doth fade away;
 Or as the moon clothed with cloudy night
 Does show to him that walks in fear and sad affright.

* * *

And over all sad Horror with grim hue
 Did always soar, beating his iron wings;
 And after him owls and night-ravens flew,
 The hateful messengers of heavy things,
 Of death and dolour telling sad tidings;
 Whiles sad Celleno, sitting on a clift,
 A song of bitter bale and sorrow sings,
 That heart of flint asunder could have rift;
 Which having ended, after him she flieth swift.

The Cave of Despair is described with equal gloominess and power of fancy; and the fine moral declamation of the owner of it, on the evils of life, almost makes one in love with death. In the story of Malbecco, who is hunted by jealousy, and in vain strives to run away from his own thoughts,

High over hill and over dale he flies—

the truth of human passion and the preternatural ending are equally striking. It is not fair to compare Spenser with Shakespeare, in point of interest. A fairer comparison would be with *Comus*; and the result would not be unfavourable to Spenser. There is only one work of the same allegorical kind, which has more interest than Spenser (with scarcely less imagination): and that is the *Pilgrims's Progress*. The three first books of the *Faery Queen* are very superior to the three last. One would think that Pope, who used to ask if any one had ever

read the *Faëry Queen* through, had only dipped into these last. The only things in them equal to the former are the account of Talus, the Iron Man, and the delightful episode of Pastorella.

The language of Spenser is full, and copious, to overflowing: it is less pure and idiomatic than Chaucer's, and is enriched and adorned with phrases borrowed from the different languages of Europe, both ancient and modern. He was, probably, seduced into a certain license of expression by the difficulty of filling up the moulds of his complicated rhymed stanza from the limited resources of his native language. This stanza, with alternate and repeatedly recurring rhymes, is borrowed from the Italians. It was peculiarly fitted to their language, which abounds in similar vowel terminations, and is as little adapted to ours, from the stubborn, unaccommodating resistance which the consonant endings of the northern languages make to this sort of endless sing-song. Not that I would on that account part with the stanza of Spenser. We are, perhaps, indebted to this very necessity of finding out new forms of expression, and to the occasional faults to which it led, for a poetical language, rich and varied and magnificent beyond all former, and almost all later, example. His versification is, at once, the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds, 'in many a winding bout of linked sweetness long drawn out', that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety of modulation—dwelling on the pauses of the action,

or flowing on in a fuller tide of harmony with the movement of the sentiment. It has not the bold dramatic transitions of Shakespeare's blank verse, nor the high-raised tone of Milton's; but it is the perfection of melting harmony, dissolving the soul in pleasure, or holding it captive in the chains of suspense. Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he has invented not only a language, but a music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite, like those of the waves of the sea: but the effect is still the same, lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be ever recalled.

LECTURE III

ON SHAKESPEARE AND MILTON

IN looking back to the great works of genius in former times, we are sometimes disposed to wonder at the little progress which has since been made in poetry, and in the arts of imitation in general. But this is perhaps a foolish wonder. Nothing can be more contrary to the fact, than the supposition that in what we understand by the *fine arts*, as painting, and poetry, relative perfection is only the result of repeated efforts in successive periods, and that what has been once well done, constantly leads to something better. What is mechanical, reducible to rule, or capable of demonstration, is progressive, and admits of gradual improvement: what is not mechanical, or definite, but depends on feeling, taste, and genius, very soon becomes stationary, or retrograde, and loses more than it gains by transfusion. The contrary opinion is a vulgar error, which has grown up, like many others, from transferring an analogy of one kind to something quite distinct, without taking into the account the difference in the nature of the things, or attending to the difference of the results. For most persons, finding what wonderful advances have been made in biblical

criticism, in chemistry, in mechanics, in geometry, astronomy, etc., *i. e.* in things depending on mere inquiry and experiment, or on absolute demonstration, have been led hastily to conclude that there was a general tendency in the efforts of the human intellect to improve by repetition, and, in all other arts and institutions, to grow perfect and mature by time. We look back upon the theological creed of our ancestors, and their discoveries in natural philosophy, with a smile of pity: science, and the arts connected with it, have all had their infancy, their youth, and manhood, and seem to contain in them no principle of limitation or decay: and, enquiring no farther about the matter, we infer, in the intoxication of our pride, and the height of our self-congratulation, that the same progress has been made, and will continue to be made, in all other things which are the work of man. The fact, however, stares us so plainly in the face, that one would think the smallest reflection must suggest the truth, and overturn our sanguine theories. The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous. Those arts, which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power, have always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have in general declined ever after. This is the peculiar distinction and

privilege of each, of science, and of art: of the one, never to attain its utmost limit of perfection; and of the other, to arrive at it almost at once. Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Dante, and Ariosto, (Milton alone was of a later age, and not the worse for it)—Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo, Correggio, Cervantes, and Boccaccio, the Greek sculptors and tragedians—all lived near the beginning of their arts—perfected, and all but created, them. These giant sons of genius stand indeed upon the earth, but they tower above their fellows; and the long line of their successors, in different ages, does not interpose any object to obstruct their view, or lessen their brightness. In strength and stature they are unrivalled; in grace and beauty they have not been surpassed. In after ages, and more refined periods (as they are called), great men have arisen one by one, as it were by throes and at intervals; though, in general, the best of these cultivated and artificial minds were of an inferior order; as Tasso and Pope, among poets; Guido and Vandyke, among painters. But in the earlier stages of the arts, as soon as the first mechanical difficulties had been got over, and the language was sufficiently acquired, they rose by clusters, and in constellations, never so to rise again!

The arts of painting and poetry are conversant with the world of thought within us, and with the world of sense around us—with what we know, and see, and feel intimately. They flow from the sacred shrine of our own breasts, and are kindled at the living lamp of nature. But the pulse of the passions assuredly beat

as high, the depths and soundings of the human heart were as well understood, three thousand, or three hundred, years ago as they are at present: the face of nature and 'the human face divine' shone as bright then as they have ever done. But it is *their* light, reflected by true genius on art, that marks out its path before it, and sheds a glory round the Muses' feet like that which

Circled Una's angel face,
And made a sunshine in the shady place.

The four greatest names in English poetry. are almost the four first we come to—Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. There are no others that can really be put in competition with these. The two last have had justice done them by the voice of common fame. Their names are blazoned in the very firmament of reputation; while the two first, (though 'the fault has been more in their stars than in themselves, that they are underlings') either never emerged far above the horizon, or were too soon involved in the obscurity of time. The three first of these are excluded from Dr Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* (Shakespeare indeed is so from the dramatic form of his composition): and the fourth, Milton, is admitted with a reluctant and churlish welcome.

In comparing these four writers together, it might be said that Chaucer excels as the poet of manners, or of real life; Spenser, as the poet of romance; Shakespeare, as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term); and Milton, as the poet of morality. Chaucer most fre-

quently describes things as they are; Spenser, as we wish them to be; Shakespeare, as they would be; and Milton, as they ought to be. As poets, and as great poets, imagination, that is, the power of feigning things according to nature, was common to them all: but the principle or moving power, to which this faculty was most subservient in Chaucer, was habit, or inveterate prejudice; in Spenser, novelty, and the love of the marvellous; in Shakespeare, it was the force of passion, combined with every variety of possible circumstances; and in Milton, only with the highest. The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity; of Spenser, remoteness; of Milton, elevation; of Shakespeare, every thing. It has been said, by some critic, that Shakespeare was distinguished from the other dramatic writers of his day only by his wit; that they had all his other qualities but that; that one writer had as much sense, another as much fancy, another as much knowledge of character, another the same depth of passion, and another as great a power of language. This statement is not true; nor is the inference from it well-founded, even if it were. This person does not seem to have been aware, that, upon his own showing, the great distinction of Shakespeare's genius was its virtually including the genius of all the great men of his age, and not his differing from them in one accidental particular. But to have done with such minute and literal trifling.

The striking peculiarity of Shakespeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds—so that

it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. He 'had a mind reflecting ages past', and present—all the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him. His genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and on the foolish, the monarch and the beggar: 'All corners of the earth, kings, queens, and states, maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave', are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. He turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men, and the individuals as they passed, with their different concerns, passions, follies, vices, virtues, actions, and motives—as well those that they knew, as those which they did not know or acknowledge to themselves. The dreams of childhood, the ravings of despair, were the toys of his fancy. Airy beings waited at his call, and came at his bidding. Harmless fairies 'nodded to him, and

did him curtesies': and the night-hag bestrode the blast at the command of 'his so potent art'. The world of spirits lay open to him, like the world of real men and women: and there is the same truth in his delineations of the one as of the other; for if the preternatural characters he describes could be supposed to exist, they would speak, and feel and act, as he makes them. He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects, 'subject to the same skyey influences', the same local, outward, and unforeseen accidents which would occur in reality. Thus, the character of Caliban not only stands before us with language and manners of its own, but the scenery and situation of the enchanted island he inhabits, the traditions of the place, its strange noises, its hidden recesses, 'his frequent haunts and ancient neighbourhood', are given with a miraculous truth of nature, and with all the familiarity of an old recollection. The whole 'coheres semblably together', in time, place, and circumstance. In reading this author, you do not merely learn what his characters say—you see their persons. By something expressed or understood, you are at no loss to decypher their peculiar physiognomy, the meaning of a look, the grouping, the bye-play, as we might see it on the stage. A word, an epithet, paints a whole scene, or throws us back

whole years in the history of the person represented. So (as it has been ingeniously remarked) when Prospero describes himself as left alone in the boat with his daughter, the epithet which he applies to her, 'Me and thy *crying* self', flings the imagination instantly back from the grown woman to the helpless condition of infancy, and places the first and most trying scene of his misfortunes before us, with all that he must have suffered in the interval. How well the silent anguish of Macduff is conveyed to the reader, by the friendly expostulation of Malcolm—'What! man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows!' Again, Hamlet, in the scene with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, somewhat abruptly concludes his fine soliloquy on life by saying, 'Man delights not me, nor woman neither,—though by your smiles you seem to say so'. Which is explained by their answer—'My lord, we had no such stuff in our thoughts. But we smiled to think, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you whom we met on the way': as if, while Hamlet was making this speech, his two old schoolfellows from Wittenburg had been really standing by, and he had seen them smiling by stealth at the idea of the players crossing their minds. It is not 'a combination, and a form' of words, a set speech or two, a preconcerted theory of a character, that will do this: but all the persons concerned must have been present in the poet's imagination, as at a kind of rehearsal; and whatever would have passed through their minds on the occasion, and have been observed by others, passed

through his, and is made known to the reader. I may add in passing, that Shakespeare always gives the best directions for the costume and carriage of his heroes. Thus, to take one example, Ophelia gives the following account of Hamlet; and as Ophelia had seen Hamlet, I should think her word ought to be taken against that of any modern authority.

Ophelia. My lord, as I was reading in my closet,
Prince Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,
No hat upon his head, his stockings loose,
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ancle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous,
As if he had been sent from hell
To speak of horrors, thus he comes before me.

Polonius. Mad for thy love!

Oph. My lord, I do not know,
But truly I do fear it.

Pol. What said he?

Oph. He took me by the wrist, and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow,
He falls to such perusal of my face,
As he would draw it: long staid he so;
At last a little shaking of my arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound,
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
For out of doors he went without their help,
And to the last bended their light on me.

Act II. Scene 1.

How, after this airy, fantastic idea of irregular grace and bewildered melancholy, any one can play Hamlet, as we have seen it played, with strut, and stare and antic right-angled sharp-pointed gestures, it is difficult to say, unless it

be that Hamlet is not bound, by the prompter's cue, to study the part of Ophelia. The account of Ophelia's death begins thus:

There is a willow hanging o'er a brook,
That shows its hoary leaves in the glassy stream.

Now this is an instance of the same unconscious power of mind which is as true to nature as itself. The leaves of the willow are, in fact, white underneath, and it is this part of them which would appear 'hoary' in the reflection in the brook. The same sort of intuitive power, the same faculty of bringing every object in nature, whether present or absent, before the mind's eye, is observable in the speech of Cleopatra, when conjecturing what were the employments of Antony in his absence: 'He's speaking now, or murmuring, Where's my serpent of old Nile?' How fine to make Cleopatra have this consciousness of her own character, and to make her feel that it is this for which Antony is in love with her! She says, after the battle of Actium, when Antony has resolved to risk another fight, 'It is my birth-day; I had thought to have held it poor: but since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra'. What other poet would have thought of such a casual resource of the imagination, or would have dared to avail himself of it? The thing happens in the play as it might have happened in fact. That which, perhaps, more than any thing else distinguishes the dramatic productions of Shakespeare from all others is this wonderful truth and individuality of conception. Each of his characters is as much itself, and as

absolutely independent of the rest, as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood; they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he had stood by at the time, and overheard what passed. As in our dreams, we hold conversations with ourselves, make remarks, or communicate intelligence, and have no idea of the answer which we shall receive, and which we ourselves make, till we hear it—so the dialogues in Shakespeare are carried on, without any consciousness of what is to follow, without any appearance of preparation or premeditation. The gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis: all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature. Each object and circumstance exists in his mind, as it would have existed in reality: each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without confusion or effort. In the world of his imagination, everything has a life, a place, and being of its own!

Chaucer's characters are sufficiently distinct

from one another, but they are too little varied in themselves, too much like identical propositions. They are consistent, but uniform; we get no new idea of them from first to last; they are not placed in different lights, nor are their subordinate *traits* brought out in new situations; they are like portraits or physiological studies, with the distinguishing features marked with inconceivable truth and precision, but that preserve the same unaltered air and attitude. Shakespeare's are historical figures, equally true and correct, but put into action, where every nerve and muscle is displayed in the struggle with others, with all the effect of collision and contrast, with every variety of light and shade. Chaucer's characters are narrative, Shakespeare's dramatic, Milton's epic. That is, Chaucer told only as much of his story as he pleased, as was required for a particular purpose. He answered for his characters himself. In Shakespeare they are introduced upon the stage, are liable to be asked all sorts of questions, and are forced to answer for themselves. In Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of character. In Shakespeare there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternate affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought in contact with it. Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result, the turn which the character will take in its new circumstances. Milton took only a few simple principles of character, and raised them to the utmost conceivable grandeur, and refined them from every base alloy. His imag-

ination, 'nigh sphered in Heaven', claimed kindred only with what he saw from that height, and could raise to the same elevation with itself. He sat retired, and kept his state alone, 'playing with wisdom'; while Shakespeare mingled with the crowd, and played the host, 'to make society the sweeter welcome'.

The passion in Shakespeare is of the same nature as his delineation of character. It is not some one habitual feeling, or sentiment, preying upon itself, growing out of itself, and moulding everything to itself; it is passion modified by passion, by all the other feelings to which the individual is liable, and to which others are liable with him; subject to all the fluctuations of caprice and accident; calling into play all the resources of the understanding and all the energies of the will; irritated by obstacles, or yielding to them; rising from small beginnings to its utmost height; now drunk with hope, now stung to madness, now sunk in despair, now blown to air with a breath, now raging like a torrent. The human soul is made the sport of fortune, the prey of adversity: it is stretched on the wheel of destiny, in restless ecstasy. The passions are in a state of projection. Years are melted down to moments, and every instant teems with fate. We know the results, we see the process. Thus, after Iago has been boasting to himself of the effect of his poisonous suggestions on the mind of Othello, 'which, with a little act upon the blood, will work like mines of sulphur', he adds

Look where he comes! not poppy, nor mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the East,

Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday.

And he enters at this moment, like the crested serpent, crowned with his wrongs and raging for revenge! The whole depends upon the turn of a thought. A word, a look, blows the spark of jealousy into a flame; and the explosion is immediate and terrible as a volcano. The dialogues in *Lear*, in *Macbeth*, that between Brutus and Cassius, and nearly all those in Shakespeare, where the interest is wrought up to its highest pitch, afford examples of this dramatic fluctuation of passion. The interest in Chaucer is quite different; it is like the course of a river, strong, and full, and increasing. In Shakespeare, on the contrary, it is like the sea, agitated this way and that, and loud-lashed by furious storms; while, in the still pauses of the blast, we distinguish only the cries of despair, or the silence of death! Milton, on the other hand, takes the imaginative part of passion—that which remains after the event, which the mind reposes on when all is over, which looks upon circumstances from the remotest elevation of thought and fancy, and abstracts them from the world of action to that of contemplation. The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves, as they take us by surprise, or force us upon action, ‘while rage with rage doth sympathise’: the objects of epic poetry affect us through the medium of the imagination, by magnitude and distance, by their permanence and universality. The one fill us with terror and pity, the other with admiration and delight. There are certain ob-

jects that strike the imagination, and inspire awe in the very idea of them, independently of any dramatic interest, that is, of any connection with the vicissitudes of human life. For instance, we cannot think of the pyramids of Egypt, of a Gothic ruin, or an old Roman encampment, without a certain emotion, a sense of power and sublimity coming over the mind. The heavenly bodies that hang over our heads wherever we go, and 'in their untroubled element shall shine when we are laid in dust, and all our cares forgotten', affect us in the same way. Thus, Satan's address to the Sun has an epic, not a dramatic interest; for though the second person in the dialogue makes no answer and feels no concern, yet the eye of that vast luminary is upon him, like the eye of Heaven, and seems conscious of what he says, like an universal presence. Dramatic poetry and epic, in their perfection, indeed, approximate to and strengthen one another. Dramatic poetry borrows aid from the dignity of persons and things, as the heroic does from human passion, but in theory they are distinct. When Richard II calls for the looking-glass, to contemplate his faded majesty in it, and bursts into that affecting exclamation: 'Oh, that I were a mockerying of snow, to melt away before the sun of Bolingbroke', we have here the utmost force of human passion, combined with the ideas of regal splendour and fallen power. When Milton says of Satan:

His form had not yet lost
All her original brightness, nor appear'd
Less than archangel ruin'd, and th' excess
Of glory obscur'd;

the mixture of beauty, of grandeur, and pathos, from the sense of irreparable loss, of never-ending, unavailing regret, is perfect.

The great fault of a modern school of poetry is that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility; or, what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds. Milton and Shakespeare did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of the one and the other, to fill up the dreary void with the moods of their own Minds. They owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life. But to the men I speak of, there is nothing interesting, nothing heroical, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the same. They do not enter into the feeling. They cannot understand the terms. They are even debarred from the last poor, paltry consolation of an unmanly triumph over fallen greatness; for their minds reject, with a convulsive effort and intolerable loathing, the very idea that there ever was, or was thought to be, anything superior to themselves. All that has ever excited the attention or admiration of the world they look upon with the most perfect indifference; and they are surprised to find that the world repays their indifference with scorn. 'With what measure they mete, it has been meted to them again'.

Shakespeare's imagination is of the same plastic kind as his conception of character or passion. 'It glances from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven'. Its movement is rapid and devious. It unites the most opposite extremes; or, as Puck says, in boasting of his own feats, 'puts a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes'. He seems always hurrying from his subject, even while describing it; but the stroke, like the lightning's, is sure as it is sudden. He takes the widest possible range, but from that very range he has his choice of the greatest variety and aptitude of materials. He brings together images the most alike, but placed at the greatest distance from each other; that is, found in circumstances of the greatest dissimilitude. From the remoteness of his combinations, and the celerity with which they are effected, they coalesce the more indissolubly together. The more the thoughts are strangers to each other, and the longer they have been kept asunder, the more intimate does their union seem to become. Their felicity is equal to their force. Their likeness is made more dazzling by their novelty. They startle, and take the fancy prisoner in the same instant. I will mention one or two which are very striking, and not much known, out of *Troilus and Cressida*. Æneas says to Agamemnon:

I ask that I may waken reverence,
And on the cheek be ready with a blush,
Modest as morning, when she coldly eyes
The youthful Phœbus.

Ulysses, urging Achilles to show himself in the field, says:

No man is the lord of anything,
Till he communicate his parts to others:
Nor doth he of himself know them for aught,
Till he behold them formed in the applause,
Where they're extended! which like an arch reverberates
The voice again, or like a gate of steel,
Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
Its figure and its heat.

Patroclus gives the indolent warrior the same advice:

Rouse yourself; and the weak wanton Cupid
Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
And, like a dew-drop from the lion's mane,
Be shook to air.

Shakspeare's language and versification are like the rest of him. He has a magic power over words; they come winged at his bidding; and seem to know their places. They are struck out at a heat, on the spur of the occasion, and have all the truth and vividness which arise from an actual impression of the objects. His epithets and single phrases are like sparkles, thrown off from an imagination fired by the whirling rapidity of its own motion. His language is hieroglyphical. It translates thoughts into visible images. It abounds in sudden transitions and elliptical expressions. This is the source of his mixed metaphors, which are only abbreviated forms of speech. These, however, give no pain from long custom. They have, in fact, become idioms in the language. They are the building, and not the scaffolding, to thought. We take the meaning and effect of a well-known passage entire, and no more stop to scan and spell out the particular words and phrases, than the syllables of which

they are composed. In trying to recollect any other author, one sometimes stumbles, in case of failure, on a word as good. In Shakespeare, any other word but the true one is sure to be wrong. If anybody, for instance, could not recollect the words of the following description:

Light thickens,
And the crow makes wing to the rooky wood,

he would be greatly at a loss to substitute others for them equally expressive of the feeling. These remarks, however, are strictly applicable only to the impassioned parts of Shakespeare's language, which flowed from the warmth and originality of his imagination, and were his own. The language used for prose conversation and ordinary business is sometimes technical, and involved in the affectation of the time. Compare, for example, Othello's apology to the Senate, relating 'his whole course of love', with some of the preceding parts, relating to his appointment, and the official dispatches from Cyprus. In this respect, 'the business of the state does him offence'. His versification is no less powerful, sweet, and varied. It has every occasional excellence, of sullen intricacy, crabbed and perplexed, or of the smoothest and loftiest expansion—from the ease and familiarity of measured conversation to the lyrical sounds

Of ditties highly penned,
Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bower,
With ravishing division to her lute.

It is the only blank verse in the language, except Milton's, that for itself is readable. It is

not stately and uniformly swelling like his, but varied and broken, by the inequalities of the ground it has to pass over in its uncertain course,

And so by many winding nooks it strays,
With willing sport to the wild ocean.

It remains to speak of the faults of Shakespeare. They are not so many, or so great, as they have been represented; what there are, are chiefly owing to the following causes: The universality of his genius was, perhaps, a disadvantage to his single works; the variety of his resources, sometimes diverting him from applying them to the most effectual purposes. He might be said to combine the powers of Æschylus and Aristophanes, of Dante and Rabelais, in his own mind. If he had been only half what he was, he would perhaps have appeared greater. The natural ease and indifference of his temper made him sometimes less scrupulous than he might have been. He is relaxed and careless in critical places; he is in earnest throughout, only in *Timon*, *Macbeth*, and *Lear*. Again, he had no models of acknowledged excellence constantly in view to stimulate his efforts, and, by all that appears, no love of fame. He wrote for the 'great vulgar and the small', in his time, not for posterity. If Queen Elizabeth and the maids of honour laughed heartily at his worst jokes, and the catcalls in the gallery were silent at his best passages, he went home satisfied, and slept the next night well. He did not trouble himself about Voltaire's criticisms. He was willing to take advantage of the ignorance of the age in many things; and if his plays pleased others, not to

quarrel with them himself. His very facility of production would make him set less value on his own excellences, and not care to distinguish nicely between what he did well or ill. His blunders in chronology and geography do not amount to above half a dozen, and they are offences against chronology and geography, not against poetry. As to the unities, he was right in setting them at defiance. He was fonder of puns than became so great a man. His barbarisms were those of his age. His genius was his own. He had no objection to float down with the stream of common taste and opinion: he rose above it by his own buoyancy, and an impulse which he could not keep under, in spite of himself or others, and 'his [delights did show most dolphin-like.'

He had an equal genius for comedy and tragedy; and his tragedies are better than his comedies, because tragedy is better than comedy. His female characters, which have been found fault with as insipid, are the finest in the world. Lastly, Shakespeare was the least of a coxcomb of any one that ever lived, and much of a gentleman.

Shakespeare discovers in his writings little religious enthusiasm, and an indifference to personal reputation; he had none of the bigotry of his age, and his political prejudices were not very strong. In these respects, as well as in every other, he formed a direct contrast to Milton. Milton's works are a perpetual invocation to the Muses; a hymn to Fame. He had his thoughts constantly fixed on the contemplation of the Hebrew theocracy, and of a

perfect commonwealth; and he seized the pen with a hand just warm from the touch of the ark of faith. His religious zeal infused its character into his imagination; so that he devotes himself with the same sense of duty to the cultivation of his genius, as he did to the exercise of virtue, or the good of his country. The spirit of the poet, the patriot, and the prophet, vied with each other in his breast. His mind appears to have held equal communion with the inspired writers, and with the bards and sages of ancient Greece and Rome;

Blind Thamyras, and blind Mœonides,
And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old.

He had a high standard, with which he was always comparing himself, nothing short of which could satisfy his jealous ambition.

Sad task, yet argument
Not less, but more heroic, than the wrath
Of stern Achilles on his foe pursued,
If answerable still, I can obtain.

——— Unless an age too late, or cold
Climate, or years, damp my extended wing.

He thought of nobler forms and nobler things than those he found about him. He lived apart, in the solitude of his own thoughts, carefully excluding from his mind whatever might distract its purposes or alloy its purity, or damp its zeal. 'With darkness and with dangers compassed round', he had the mighty models of antiquity always present to his thoughts, and determined to raise a monument of equal height and glory, 'piling up every stone of lustre from the brook', for the delight

and wonder of posterity. He had girded himself up, and, as it were, sanctified his genius to this service from his youth. 'For after', he says, 'I had from my first years, by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, been exercised to the tongues, and some sciences, as my age could suffer, by sundry masters and teachers, it was found that whether aught was imposed upon me by them, or betaken to of my own choice, the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live; but much latelier, in the private academies of Italy, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twent yor thereabout, met with acceptance above what was looked for; I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life), joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after-times as they should not willingly let it die. The accomplishment of these intentions which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself anything worth to my country, lies not but in a power above man's to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and free leisure will extend. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet, I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised

from the heat of youth or the vapours of wine: like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs. Although it nothing content me to have disclosed thus much beforehand; but that I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingness I endured to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies.'

So that of Spenser:

The noble heart that harbours virtuous thought,
And is with child of glorious great intent,
Can never rest until it forth have brought
The eternal brood of glory excellent.

Milton, therefore, did not write from casual impulse, but after a severe examination of his own strength, and with a resolution to leave nothing undone which it was in his power to do. He always labours, and almost always succeeds. He strives hard to say the finest things in the world, and he does say them. He adorns and dignifies his subject to the utmost: he surrounds

it with every possible association of beauty or grandeur, whether moral, intellectual, or physical. He refines on his descriptions of beauty; loading sweets on sweets till the sense aches at them; and raises his images of terror to a gigantic elevation, that 'makes Ossa like a war'. In Milton, there is always an appearance of effort: in Shakspeare, scarcely any.

Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and exhausted every source of imitation, sacred or profane; yet he is perfectly distinct from every other writer. He is a writer of centos, and yet in originality scarcely inferior to Homer. The power of his mind is stamped on every line. The fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials. In reading his works, we feel ourselves under the influence of a mighty intellect, that the nearer it approaches to others, becomes more distinct from them. The quantity of art in him shows the strength of his genius: the weight of his intellectual obligations would have oppressed any other writer. Milton's learning has all the effect of intuition. He describes objects, of which he could only have read in books, with the vividness of actual observation. His imagination has the force of nature. He makes words tell as pictures:

Him followed Rimmon, whose delightful seat
Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
Of Abbana and Pharphar, lucid streams.

The word *lucid* here gives to the idea all the sparkling effect of the most perfect landscape.
And again:

As when a vulture on Imaus bred,
 Whose snowy ridge the roving Tartar bounds,
 Dislodging from a region scarce of prey,
 To gorge the flesh of lambs and yeanling kids
 On hills where flocks are fed. *flies towards the springs*
Of Ganges or Hydaspes, Indian streams;
But in his way lights on the barren plains
Of Sericana, where Chinese drive
With sails and wind their cany waggons light.

If Milton had taken a journey for the express purpose, he could not have described this scenery and mode of life better. Such passages are like demonstrations of natural history. Instances might be multiplied without end.

There is also a decided tone in his descriptions, an eloquent dogmatism, as if the poet spoke from thorough conviction, which Milton probably derived from his spirit of partisanship, or else his spirit of partisanship from the natural firmness and vehemence of his mind. In this Milton resembles Dante (the only one of the moderns with whom he has anything in common), and it is remarkable that Dante, as well as Milton, was a political partisan. That approximation to the severity of impassioned prose, which has been made an objection to Milton's poetry, is one of its chief excellences.

We might be tempted to suppose that the vividness with which he describes visible objects was owing to their having acquired an unusual degree of strength in his mind, after the privation of his sight; but we find the same palpableness and truth in the descriptions which occur in his early poems. In *Lycidas* he speaks of 'the great vision of the guarded mount', with that preternatural weight of impression with

which it would present itself suddenly to 'the pilot of some small night-foundered skiff': and the lines in the *Penseroso*, describing 'the wandering moon':

Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray
Through the heaven's wide pathless way,

are as if he had gazed himself blind in looking at her. There is also the same depth of impression in his descriptions of the objects of all the different senses, whether colours, or sounds, or smells—the same absorption of his mind in whatever engaged his attention at the time. Milton had as much of what is meant by *gusto* as any poet*. He forms the most intense conception of things, and then embodies them by a single stroke of his pen. He has an inveterate attachment to the objects he describes and to the words describing them:

Wild above rule or art, *enormous* bliss.

It has been indeed objected to Milton, by a common perversity of criticism, that his ideas were musical rather than picturesque, as if, because they were in the highest degree musical, they must be (to keep the sage critical balance even, and to allow no one man to possess two qualities at the same time) proportionably deficient in other respects.—But Milton's poetry is not cast in any such narrow, common-

* The infinite quantity of dramatic invention in Shakespeare takes from his *gusto*. The power he delights to show is not intense, but discursive. He never insists on anything as much as he might, except a quibble.

place mould; it is not so barren of resources. His worship of the Muse was not so simple or confined. A sound arises 'like a steam of rich distilled perfumes'; we hear the pealing organ, but the incense on the altars is also there, and the statues of the gods are ranged around! The ear, indeed, predominates over the eye, because it is more immediately affected, and because the language of music blends more immediately with, and forms a more natural accompaniment to, the variable and indefinite associations of ideas conveyed by words. But where the associations of the imagination are not the principal thing, the individual object is given by Milton with equal force and beauty. The strongest and best proof of this, as a characteristic power of his mind, is, that the persons of Adam and Eve, of Satan, etc., are always accompanied, in our imagination, with the grandeur of the naked figure; they convey to us the idea of sculpture. As an instance, take the following:

He soon

Saw within ken a glorious Angel stand,
The same whom John saw also in the sun:
His back was turned, but not his brightness hid;
Of beaming sunny rays a golden tiar
Circled his head, nor less his locks behind,
Illustrious on his shoulders fledge with wings
Lay waving round; on some great charge employ'd
He seem'd, or fix'd in cogitation deep.
Glad was the spirit impure, as now in hope
To find who might direct his wand'ring flight
To Paradise, the happy seat of man
His journey's end, and our beginning woe.
But first he casts to change his proper shape,
Which else might work him danger or delay:
And now a stripling cherub he appears,

Not of the prime, yet such as in his face
 Youth smiled celestial, and to every limb
 Suitable grace diffus'd, so well he feign'd:
 Under a coronet his flowing hair
 In curls on either cheek play'd; wings he wore
 Of many a colour'd plume sprinkled with gold,
 His habit fit for speed succinct, and held
 Before his decent steps a silver wand.

The figures introduced here have all the elegance and precision of a Greek statue; glossy and impurpled, tinged with golden light, and musical as the strings of Memnon's harp!

Again, nothing can be more magnificent than the portrait of Beelzebub:

With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
 The weight of mightiest monarchies.

Or the comparison of Satan, as he 'lay floating many a rood', to 'that sea beast',

Leviathan, which God of all his works
 Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream!

What a force of imagination is there in this last expression! What an idea it conveys of the size of that hugest of created beings, as if it shrunk up the ocean to a stream, and took up the sea in its nostrils as a very little thing! Force of style is one of Milton's greatest excellences. Hence, perhaps, he stimulates us more in the reading, and less afterwards. The way to defend Milton against all impugnors is to take down the book and read it.

Milton's blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakespeare's) that deserves the name of verse. Dr. Johnson, who had modelled his ideas of versification on the

regular sing-song of Pope, condemns the *Paradise Lost* as harsh and unequal. I shall not pretend to say that this is not sometimes the case; for where a degree of excellence beyond the mechanical rules of art is attempted, the poet must sometimes fail. But I imagine that there are more perfect examples in Milton of musical expression, or of an adaptation of the sound and movement of the verse to the meaning of the passage, than in all our other writers, whether of rhyme or blank verse, put together (with the exception already mentioned). Spenser is the most harmonious of our stanza writers, as Dryden is the most sounding and varied of our rhymists. But in neither is there anything like the same ear for music, the same power of approximating the varieties of poetical, to those of musical, rhythm, as there is in our great epic poet. The sound of his lines is moulded into the expression of the sentiment, almost of the very image. They rise or fall, pause or hurry rapidly on, with exquisite art, but without the least trick or affectation, as the occasion seems to require.

The following are some of the finest instances:

His hand was known
In heaven by many a tower'd structure high;—
Nor was his name unheard or unador'd
In ancient Greece: and in the Ausonian land
Men called him Mulciber: and how he fell
From Heaven, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
Sheer o'er the crystal battlements; from morn
To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
A summer's day; and with the setting sun
Dropt from the zenith like a falling star
On Lemnos, the Ægean isle: thus they relate,
Erring.

But chief the spacious hall
 Thick swarm'd, both on the ground and in the air,
 Brush'd with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees
 In spring time, when the sun with Taurus rides,
 Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
 In clusters; they among fresh dews and flow'rs
 Fly to and fro: or on the smoothed plank,
 The suburb of their straw-built citadel,
 New rubb'd with balm, expatiate and confer
 Their state affairs. So thick the airy crowd
 Swarm'd and were straiten'd; till the signal giv'n,
 Behold a wonder! They but now who seem'd
 In bigness to surpass earth's giant sons,
 Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room
 Throng numberless, like that Pygmean race
 Beyond the Indian mount, or fairy elves,
 Whose midnight revels by a forest side,
 Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,
 Or dreams he sees, while over-head the moon
 Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth
 Wheels her pale course: they on their mirth and dance
 Intent, with jocund music charm his ear;
 At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds.

I can only give another instance, though I have some difficulty in leaving off.

Round he surveys (and well might, where he stood
 So high above the circling canopy
 Of night's extended shade) from th' eastern point
 Of Libra to the fleecy star that bears
 Andromeda far off Atlantic seas
 Beyond the horizon: then from pole to pole
 He views in breadth, and without longer pause
 Down right into the world's first region throws
 His flight precipitant, and winds with ease
 Through the pure marble air his oblique way
 Amongst innumerable stars that shone,
 Stars distant, but nigh hand seem'd other worlds;
 Or other worlds they seem'd, or happy isles, etc.

The verse, in this exquisitely modulated passage, floats up and down as if it had itself wings. Milton has himself given us the theory of his versification,

Such as the meeting soul may pierce
In notes with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out.

Dr Johnson and Pope would have converted his vaulting Pegasus into a rocking-horse. Read any other blank verse but Milton's—Thomson's, Young's, Cowper's, Wordsworth's—and it will be found, from the want of the same insight into 'the hidden soul of harmony', to be mere lumbering prose.

To proceed to a consideration of the merits of *Paradise Lost* in the most essential point of view, I mean as to the poetry of character and passion. I shall say nothing of the fable, or of other technical objections or excellences; but I shall try to explain at once the foundation of the interest belonging to the poem. I am ready to give up the dialogues in Heaven, where, as Pope justly observes, 'God the Father turns a school-divine'; nor do I consider the battle of the angels as the climax of sublimity, or the most successful effort of Milton's pen. In a word, the interest of the poem arises from the daring ambition and fierce passions of Satan, and from the account of the paradisaical happiness, and the loss of it by our first parents. Three-fourths of the work are taken up with these characters, and nearly all that relates to them is unmingled sublimity and beauty. The two first books alone are like two massy pillars of solid gold.

Satan is the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem; and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty. He was the first of created beings, who, for endeavouring

to be equal with the highest, and to divide the empire of heaven with the Almighty, was hurled down to hell. His aim was no less than the throne of the universe; his means, myriads of angelic armies bright, the third part of the heavens, whom he lured after him with his countenance, and who durst defy the Omnipotent in arms. His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest; but not so his despair, for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His strength of mind was matchless as his strength of body; the vastness of his designs did not surpass the firm, inflexible determination with which he submitted to his irreversible doom, and final loss of all good. His power of action and of suffering was equal. He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left to resist or to endure. He was baffled, not confounded. He stood like a tower; or

As when Heaven's fire
Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines.

He is still surrounded with hosts of rebel angels, armed warriors, who own him as their sovereign leader, and with whose fate he sympathises as he views them round, far as the eye can reach; though he keeps aloof from them in his own mind, and holds supreme counsel only with his own breast. An outcast from Heaven, Hell trembles beneath his feet, Sin and Death are at his heels, and mankind are his easy prey.

All is not lost; th' unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield,
And what else is not to be overcome,

are still his. The sense of his punishment seems lost in the magnitude of it; the fierceness of tormenting flames is qualified and made innoxious by the greater fierceness of his pride; the loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated in thought by the power of inflicting infinite misery on others. Yet Satan is not the principle of malignity, or of the abstract love of evil, but of the abstract love of power, of pride, of self-will personified, to which last principle all other good and evil, and even his own, are subordinate. From this principle he never once flinches. His love of power and contempt for suffering are never once relaxed from the highest pitch of intensity. His thoughts burn like a hell within him; but the power of thought holds dominion in his mind over every other consideration. The consciousness of a determined purpose, of 'that intellectual being, those thoughts that wander through eternity', though accompanied with endless pain, he prefers to nonentity, to 'being swallowed up and lost in the wide womb of uncreated night'. He expresses the sum and substance of all ambition in one line. 'Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable, doing or suffering!' After such a conflict as his, and such a defeat, to retreat in order, to rally, to make terms, to exist at all, is something; but he does more than this—he founds a new empire in hell, and from it conquers this new world, whither he

bends his undaunted flight, forcing his way through nether and surrounding fires. The poet has not in all this given us a mere shadowy outline; the strength is equal to the magnitude of the conception. The Achilles of Homer is not more distinct; the Titans were not more vast; Prometheus, chained to his rock, was not a more terrific example of suffering and of crime. Wherever the figure of Satan is introduced, whether he walks or flies, 'rising aloft incumbent on the dusky air', it is illustrated with the most striking and appropriate images: so that we see it always before us, gigantic, irregular, portentous, uneasy, and disturbed—but dazzling in its faded splendour, the clouded ruins of a god. The deformity of Satan is only in the depravity of his will; he has no bodily deformity to excite our loathing or disgust. The horns and tail are not there, poor emblems of the unbending, unconquered spirit, of the writhing agonies within. Milton was too magnanimous and open an antagonist to support his argument by the bye-tricks of a hump and cloven foot; to bring into the fair field of controversy the good old Catholic prejudices of which Tasso and Dante have availed themselves, and which the mystic German critics would restore. He relied on the justice of his cause, and did not scruple to give the devil his due. Some persons may think that he has carried his liberality too far, and injured the cause he professed to espouse by making him the chief person in his poem. Considering the nature of his subject, he would be equally in danger of running into this fault,

from his faith in religion, and his love of rebellion; and perhaps each of these motives had its full share in determining the choice of his subject.

Not only the figure of Satan, but his speeches in council, his soliloquies, his address to Eve, his share in the war in heaven, or in the fall of man, show the same decided superiority of character. To give only one instance, almost the first speech he makes:

Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,
Said then the lost archangel, this the seat
That we must change for Heaven; this mournful gloom
For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
Who now is sov'rain can dispose and bid
What shall be right: farthest from him is best
Whom reason hath equall'd, force hath made supreme
Above his equals. Farewell happy fields,
Where joy for ever dwells! Hail horrors, hail
Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell,
Receive thy new possessor; one who brings
A mind not to be chang'd by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice,
To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.

The whole of the speeches and debates in Pandemonium are well worthy of the place and the occasion—with gods for speakers, and angels and archangels for hearers. There is a decided manly tone in the arguments and sentiments, an eloquent dogmatism, as if each person spoke

from thorough conviction. The author might here turn his philippics against Salmasius to good account. The rout in Heaven is like the fall of some mighty structure, nodding to its base, 'with hideous ruin and combustion down'. But, perhaps, of all the passages in *Paradise Lost*, the description of the employments of the angels during the absence of Satan, some of whom 'retreated in a silent valley, sing with notes angelical to many a harp their own heroic deeds and hapless fall by doom of battle', is the most perfect example of mingled pathos and sublimity. What proves the truth of this noble picture in every part, and that the frequent complaint of want of interest in it is the fault of the reader, not of the poet, is that when any interest of a practical kind takes a shape that can be at all turned into this (and there is little doubt that Milton had some such in his eye in writing it), each party converts it to its own purposes, feels the absolute identity of these abstracted and high speculations; and that, in fact, a noted political writer of the present day has exhausted nearly the whole account of Satan in the *Paradise Lost*, by applying it to a character whom he considered as, after the devil, (though I do not know whether he would make even that exception) the greatest enemy of the human race. This may serve to show that Milton's Satan is not a very inspired personage.

Of Adam and Eve it has been said that the ordinary reader can feel little interest in them, because they have none of the passions, pursuits, or even relations of human life, except that of man and wife, the least interesting of all others,

if not to the parties concerned, at least to the by-standers. The preference has, on this account, been given to Homer, who, it is said, has left very vivid and infinitely diversified pictures of all the passions and affections, public and private, incident to human nature—the relations of son, of brother, parent, friend, citizen, and many others. Longinus preferred the *Iliad* to the *Odyssey*, on account of the greater number of battles it contains; but I can neither agree to his criticism, nor assent to the present objection. It is true there is little action in this part of Milton's poem; but there is much repose, and more enjoyment. There are none of the everyday occurrences, contentions, disputes, wars, fightings, feuds, jealousies, trades, professions, liveries, and common handicrafts of life; 'no kind of traffic; letters are not known; no use of service, of riches, poverty, contract, succession, bourne, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none; no occupation, no treason, felony, sword, pike, knife, gun, nor need of any engine'. So much the better; thank Heaven, all these were yet to come. But still the die was cast, and in them our doom was sealed. In them

The generations were prepared; the pangs,
The internal pangs, were ready, the dread strife
Of poor humanity's afflicted will,
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.

In their first false step we trace all our future woe, with loss of Eden. But there was a short and precious interval between, like the first blush of morning before the day is overcast with tempest, the dawn of the world, the birth

of nature from 'the unapparent deep', with its first dews and freshness on its cheek, breathing odours. Theirs was the first delicious taste of life, and on them depended all that was to come of it. In them hung trembling all our hopes and fears. They were as yet alone in the world, in the eye of nature, wondering at their new being, full of enjoyment, and enraptured with one another, with the voice of their Maker walking in the garden, and ministering angels attendant on their steps, winged messengers from heaven like rosy clouds descending in their sight. Nature played around them her virgin fancies wild; and spread for them a repast 'where no crude surfeit reigned'. Was there nothing in this scene, which God and nature alone witnessed, to interest a modern critic? What need was there of action, where the heart was full of bliss and innocence without it? They had nothing to do but feel their own happiness, and 'know to know no more'. 'They toiled not, neither did they spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these'. All things seem to acquire fresh sweetness, and to be clothed with fresh beauty in their sight. They tasted as it were for themselves and us, of all that there ever was pure in human bliss. 'In them the burthen of the mystery, the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world, is lightened'. They stood awhile perfect, but they afterwards fell, and were driven out of Paradise, tasting the first fruits of bitterness as they had done of bliss. But their pangs were such as a pure spirit might feel at the sight—their tears 'such

as angels weep'. The pathos is of that mild contemplative kind which arises from regret for the loss of unspeakable happiness, and resignation to inevitable fate. There is none of the fierceness of intemperate passion, none of the agony of mind and turbulence of action, which is the result of the habitual struggle of the will with circumstances, irritated by repeated disappointment, and constantly setting its desires most eagerly on that which there is an impossibility of attaining. This would have destroyed the beauty of the whole picture. They had received their unlooked-for happiness as a free gift from their Creator's hands, and they submitted to its loss, not without sorrow, but without impious and stubborn repining.

In either hand the hast'ning angel caught
Our ling'ring parents, and to th' eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
To the subjected plain; then disappear'd.
They, looking back, all th' eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Wav'd over that flaming brand, the gate
With dreadful faces throng'd, and fiery arms:
Some natural tears they dropt, but wip'd them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide*.

* In the Appendix will be found the Author's criticisms on Milton's *Eve* and *Lycidas*.

LECTURE IV

ON DRYDEN AND POPE

DRYDEN and Pope are the great masters of the artificial style of poetry in our language, as the poets of whom I have already treated, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton, were of the natural; and though this artificial style is generally and very justly acknowledged to be inferior to the other, yet those who stand at the head of that class ought, perhaps, to rank higher than those who occupy an inferior place in a superior class. They have a clear and independent claim upon our gratitude, as having produced a kind and degree of excellence which existed equally nowhere else. What has been done well by some later writers of the highest style of poetry, is included in, and obscured by, a greater degree of power and genius in those before them: what has been done best by poets of an entirely distinct turn of mind, stands by itself, and tells for its whole amount. Young, for instance, Gray, or Akenside, only follow in the train of Milton and Shakespeare: Pope and Dryden walk by their side, though of an unequal stature, and are entitled to a first place in the lists of fame. This seems to be not only the reason of the thing, but the com-

mon sense of mankind, who, without any regular process of reflection, judge of the merit of a work not more by its inherent and absolute worth than by its originality and capacity of gratifying a different faculty of the mind, or a different class of readers; for it should be recollected that there may be readers (as well as poets) not of the highest class, though very good sort of people, and not altogether to be despised.

The question, whether Pope was a poet, has hardly yet been settled, and is hardly worth settling; for, if he was not a great poet, he must have been a great prose-writer, that is, he was a great writer of some sort. He was a man of exquisite faculties, and of the most refined taste; and as he chose verse (the most obvious distinction of poetry) as the vehicle to express his ideas, he has generally passed for a poet, and a good one. If, indeed, by a great poet, we mean one who gives the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature, or the utmost force to the passions of the heart, Pope was not in this sense a great poet; for the bent, the characteristic power of his mind, lay the clear contrary way; namely, in representing things as they appear to the indifferent observer, stripped of prejudice and passion, as in his Critical Essays; or in representing them in the most contemptible and insignificant point of view, as in his Satires; or in clothing the little with mock-dignity, as in his poems of Fancy; or in adorning the trivial incidents and familiar relations of life with the utmost elegance of expression, and all the flattering illusions of

friendship or self-love, as in his *Epistles*. He was not then distinguished as a poet of lofty enthusiasm, of strong imagination, with a passionate sense of the beauties of nature, or a deep insight into the workings of the heart; but he was a wit, and a critic, a man of sense, of observation, and the world, with a keen relish for the elegances of art, or of nature when embellished by art, a quick tact for propriety of thought and manners as established by the forms and customs of society, refined sympathy with the sentiments and habitudes of human life, as he felt them within the little circle of his family and friends. He was, in a word, the poet, not of nature, but of art; and the distinction between the two, as well as I can make it out, is this: The poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty, of power, and of passion in his own breast, sympathises with whatever is beautiful, and grand, and impassioned in nature, in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature; to be identified with, and to foreknow, and to record, the feelings of all men, at all times and places, as they are liable to the same impressions; and to exert the same power over the minds of his readers that nature does. He sees things in their eternal beauty, for he sees them as they are; he feels them in their universal interest, for he feels them as they affect the first principles of his and our common

nature. Such was Homer, such was Shakespeare, whose works will last as long as nature, because they are a copy of the indestructible forms and everlasting impulses of nature, welling out from the bosom as from a perennial spring, or stamped upon the senses by the hand of their Maker. The power of the imagination in them is the representative power of all nature. It has its centre in the human soul, and makes the circuit of the universe.

Pope was not assuredly a poet of this class, or in the first rank of it. He saw nature only dressed by art; he judged of beauty by fashion; he sought for truth in the opinions of the world; he judged of the feelings of others by his own. The capacious soul of Shakespeare had an intuitive and mighty sympathy with whatever could enter into the heart of man in all possible circumstances: Pope had an exact knowledge of all that he himself loved or hated, wished or wanted. Milton has winged his daring flight from heaven to earth, through Chaos and old Night. Pope's Muse never wandered with safety, but from his library to his grotto, or from his grotto into his library back again. His mind dwelt with greater pleasure on his own garden than on the garden of Eden; he could describe the faultless whole-length mirror that reflected his own person better than the smooth surface of the lake that reflects the face of heaven—a piece of cut glass or a pair of paste buckles with more brilliance and effect than a thousand dew-drops glittering in the sun. He would be more de-

lighted with a patent lamp than with 'the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow', that fills the skies with its soft silent lustre, that trembles through the cottage window, and cheers the watchful mariner on the lonely wave. In short, he was the poet of personality and of polished life. That which was nearest to him was the greatest; the fashion of the day bore sway in his mind over the immutable laws of nature. He preferred the artificial to the natural in external objects, because he had a stronger fellow-feeling with the self-love of the maker or proprietor of a gewgaw than admiration of that which was interesting to all mankind. He preferred the artificial to the natural in passion, because the involuntary and uncalculating impulses of the one hurried him away with a force and vehemence with which he could not grapple; while he could trifle with the conventional and superficial modifications of mere sentiment at will, laugh at or admire, put them on or off like a masquerade-dress, make much or little of them, indulge them for a longer or a shorter time, as he pleased; and because, while they amused his fancy and exercised his ingenuity, they never once disturbed his vanity, his levity, or indifference. His mind was the antithesis of strength and grandeur; its power was the power of indifference. He had none of the enthusiasm of poetry; he was in poetry what the sceptic is in religion.

It cannot be denied that his chief excellence lay more in diminishing than in aggrandizing objects; in checking, not in encouraging, our enthusiasm; in sneering at the extravagances

of fancy or passion, instead of giving a loose to them; in describing a row of pins and needles rather than the embattled spears of Greeks and Trojans; in penning a lampoon or a compliment, and in praising Martha Blount.

Shakespeare says :

In Fortune's ray and brightness
The herd hath more annoyance by the brize
Than by the tyger: but when the splitting wind
Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks,
And flies fled under shade, why then
The thing of courage,
As roused with rage, with rage doth sympathise;
And, with an accent tuned in the self-same key,
Replies to chiding Fortune.

There is none of this rough work in Pope. His Muse was on a peace-establishment, and grew somewhat effeminate by long ease and indulgence. He lived in the smiles of fortune, and basked in the favour of the great. In his smooth and polished verse we meet with no prodigies of nature, but with miracles of wit; the thunders of his pen are whispered flatteries; its forked lightnings pointed sarcasms; for 'the gnarled oak', he gives us 'the soft myrtle'; for rocks, and seas, and mountains, artificial grass-plats, gravel-walks, and tinkling rills; for earthquakes and tempests, the breaking of a flower-pot, or the fall of a china jar; for the tug and war of the elements, or the deadly strife of the passions, we have

Calm contemplation and poetic ease.

Yet within this retired and narrow circle how much, and that how exquisite, was contained !

What discrimination, what wit, what delicacy, what fancy, what lurking spleen, what elegance of thought, what pampered refinement of sentiment! It is like looking at the world through a microscope, where everything assumes a new character and a new consequence, where things are seen in their minutest circumstances and slightest shades of difference; where the little becomes gigantic, the deformed beautiful, and the beautiful deformed. The wrong end of the magnifier is, to be sure, held to every thing, but still the exhibition is highly curious, and we know not whether to be most pleased or surprised. Such, at least, is the best account I am able to give of this extraordinary man, without doing injustice to him or others. It is time to refer to particular instances in his works. *The Rape of the Lock* is the best or most ingenious of these. It is the most exquisite specimen of *flagree* work ever invented. It is admirable in proportion as it is made of nothing.

More subtle web Arachne cannot spin,
Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
Of scorched dew, do not in th' air more lightly flee.

It is made of gauze and silver spangles. The most glittering appearance is given to every thing, to paste, pomatum, billet-doux, and patches. Airs, languid airs, breathe around; the atmosphere is perfumed with affectation. A toilette is described with the solemnity of an altar raised to the goddess of vanity, and the history of a silver bodkin is given with all the pomp of heraldry. No pains are spared,

no profusion of ornament, no splendour of poetic diction, to set off the meanest things. The balance between the concealed irony and the assumed gravity is as nicely trimmed as the balance of power in Europe. The little is made great, and the great little. You hardly know whether to laugh or weep. It is the triumph of insignificance, the apotheosis of foppery and folly. It is the perfection of the mock-heroic! I will give only the two following passages in illustration of these remarks. Can any thing be more elegant and graceful than the description of *Belinda*, in the beginning of the second canto?

Not with more glories, in the ethereal plain,
 The sun first rises o'er the purpled main,
 Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams
 Launch'd on the bottom of the silver Thames,
 Fair nymphs, and well-drest youths around her shone,
 But ev'ry eye was fix'd on her alone.
 On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,
 Which Jews might kiss and infidels adore.
 Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
 Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those;
 Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
 Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
 Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike;
 And, like the sun, they shine on all alike,
 Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
 Might hide her faults, if belles had faults to hide:
 If to her share some female errors fall,
 Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.

This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
 Nourish'd two locks, which graceful hung behind
 In equal curls, and well conspir'd to deck
 With shining ringlets the smooth iv'ry neck.

The following is the introduction to the account of *Belinda's* assault upon the baron bold,

who had dissevered one of these locks 'from her fair head for ever and for ever':

Now meet thy fate, incens'd Belinda cry'd,
And drew a deadly bodkin from her side.
(The same his ancient personage to deck,
Her great, great grandsire wore about his neck,
In three seal-rings; which after, melted down,
Form'd a vast buckle for his widow's gown:
Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew,
The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew:
Then in a bodkin grac'd her mother's hairs,
Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.)

I do not know how far Pope was indebted for the original idea, or the delightful execution of this poem, to the *Lutrin* of Boileau.

The Rape of the Lock is a double-refined essence of wit and fancy, as the *Essay on Criticism* is of wit and sense. The quantity of thought and observation in this work, for so young a man as Pope was when he wrote it, is wonderful: unless we adopt the supposition that most men of genius spend the rest of their lives in teaching others what they themselves have learned under twenty. The conciseness and felicity of the expression are equally remarkable. Thus, on reasoning on the variety of men's opinion, he says:

'Tis with our judgments, as our watches; none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.

Nothing can be more original and happy than the general remarks and illustrations in the essay: the critical rules laid down are too much those of a school, and of a confined one. There is one passage in the *Essay on Criticism* in which the author speaks with that eloquent enthusiasm of the fame of ancient writers, which those will

always feel who have themselves any hope or chance of immortality. I have quoted the passage elsewhere, but I will repeat it here :

Still green with bays each ancient altar stands,
Above the reach of sacrilegious hands;
Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,
Destructive war, and all-involving age.
Hail, bards triumphant, born in happier days,
Immortal heirs of universal praise!
Whose honours with increase of ages grow.
As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow.

These lines come with double force and beauty on the reader, as they were dictated by the writer's despair of ever attaining that lasting glory which he celebrates with such disinterested enthusiasm in others, from the lateness of the age in which he lived, and from his writing in a tongue not understood by other nations, and that grows obsolete and unintelligible to ourselves at the end of every second century. But he needed not have thus antedated his own poetical doom—the loss and entire oblivion of that which can never die. If he had known, he might have boasted that 'his little bark', wafted down the stream of time,

With *theirs* should sail,
Pursue the triumph and partake the gale,

if those who know how to set a due value on the blessing were not the last to decide confidently on their own pretensions to it.

There is a cant in the present day about genius, as everything in poetry: there was a cant in the time of Pope about sense, as performing all sorts of wonders. It was a kind of watchword, the shibboleth of a critical party of

the day. As a proof of the exclusive attention which it occupied in their minds, it is remarkable that in the *Essay on Criticism* (not a very long poem) there are no less than half a score successive couplets rhyming to the word *sense*. This appears almost incredible without giving the instances, and no less so when they are given.

But of the two, less dangerous is the offence
To tire our patience than mislead our sense. *lines* 3, 4.

In search of wit these lose their common sense,
And then turn critics in their own defence. *l.* 28, 29.

Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defence,
And fills up all the mighty void of sense. *l.* 209, 10.

Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense. *l.* 324, 5.

'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence;
The sound must seem an echo to the sense. *l.* 364, 5.

At every trifle scorn to take offence;
That always shows great pride or little sense. *l.* 386, 7.

Be silent always, when you doubt your sense,
And speak, though sure, with seeming diffidence. *l.* 366, 7.

Be niggards of advice on no pretence,
For the worst avarice is that of sense. *l.* 578, 9.

Strain out the last dull dropping of their sense,
And rhyme with all the rage of impotence. *l.* 608, 9.

Horace still charms with graceful negligence,
And without method talks us into sense. *l.* 653, 4.

I have mentioned this the more for the sake of those critics who are bigotted idolisers of our author, chiefly on the score of his correctness. These persons seem to be of opinion that 'there is but one perfect writer, even Pope'. This is, however, a mistake: his excellence is by no means faultlessness. If he had no great faults, he is full of little errors. His grammatical con-

struction is often lame and imperfect. In the *Abelard and Eloise*, he says :

There died the best of passions, Love and Fame.

This is not a legitimate ellipsis. Fame is not a passion, though love is: but his ear was evidently confused by the meeting of the sounds 'love and fame', as if they of themselves immediately implied, 'love, and love of fame'. Pope's rhymes are constantly defective, being rhymes to the eye instead of the ear; and this to a greater degree, not only than in later, but than in preceding, writers. The praise of his versification must be confined to its uniform smoothness and harmony. In the translation of the *Iliad*, which has been considered as his masterpiece in style and execution, he continually changes the tenses in the same sentence for the purposes of the rhyme, which shows either a want of technical resources, or great inattention to punctilious exactness. But to have done with this.

The epistle of Eloise to Abelard is the only exception, I can think of, to the general spirit of the foregoing remarks; and I should be disingenuous not to acknowledge that it is an exception. The foundation is in the letters themselves of Abelard and Eloise, which are quite as impressive, but still in a different way. It is fine as a poem: it is finer as a piece of high-wrought eloquence. No woman could be supposed to write a better love-letter in verse. Besides the richness of the historical materials, the high *gusto* of the original sentiments which Pope had to work upon, there were perhaps circumstances in his own situation which made him enter into

the subject with even more than a poet's feeling. The tears shed are drops gushing from the heart: the words are burning sighs breathed from the soul of love. Perhaps the poem to which it bears the greatest similarity in our language is Dryden's *Tancred and Sigismunda*, taken from Boccaccio. Pope's *Eloise* will bear this comparison; and after such a test, with Boccaccio for the original author, and Dryden for the translator, it need shrink from no other. There is something exceedingly tender and beautiful in the sound of the concluding lines:

If ever chance two wandering lovers brings
To Paraclete's white walls and silver springs, etc.

The *Essay on Man* is not Pope's best work. It is a theory which Bolingbroke is supposed to have given him, and which he expanded into verse. But 'he spins the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument'. All that he says, 'the very words, and to the self-same tune', would prove just as well that whatever is is *wrong*, as that whatever is is *right*. *The Dunciad* has splendid passages, but in general it is dull, heavy, and mechanical. The sarcasm, already quoted, on Settle, the Lord Mayor's poet (for at that time there was a city, as well as a court, poet):

Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er,
But lives in Settle's numbers one day more,

is the finest inversion of immortality conceivable. It is even better than his serious apostrophe to the great heirs of glory, the triumphant bards of antiquity!

The finest burst of severe moral invective in all Pope is the prophetic conclusion of the epilogue to the Satires:

Virtue may choose the high or low degree,
 'Tis just alike to virtue, and to me;
 Dwell in a monk, or light upon a king,
 She's still the same belov'd, contented thing.
 Vice is undone, if she forgets her birth,
 And stoops from angels to the dregs of earth.
 But 'tis the fall degrades her to a whore:
 Let greatness own her, and she's mean no more.
 Her birth, her beauty, crowds and courts confess,
 Chaste matrons praise her, and grave bishops bless:
 In golden chains the willing world she draws,
 And hers the gospel is, and hers the laws;
 Mounts the tribunal, lifts her scarlet head,
 And sees pale Virtue carted in her stead.
 Lo! at the wheels of her triumphal car,
 Old England's Genius, rough with many a scar,
 Dragg'd in the dust! his arms hang idly round,
 His flag inverted trains along the ground!
 Our youth, all livery'd o'er with foreign gold,
 Before her dance; behind her crawl the old!
 See thronging millions to the Pagod run,
 And offer country, parent, wife, or son!
 Hear her black trumpet through the land proclaim
 That *not to be corrupted is the shame*.
 In soldier, churchman, patriot, man in pow'r,
 'Tis av'rice all, ambition is no more!
 See all our nobles begging to be slaves!
 See all our fools aspiring to be knaves!
 The wit of cheats, the courage of a whore,
 Are what ten thousand envy and adore:
 All, all look up with reverential awe
 At crimes that 'scape or triumph o'er the law;
 While truth, worth, wisdom, daily they decry;
 Nothing is sacred now but villany.
 Yet may this verse (if such a verse remain)
 Show there was one who held it in disdain.

His satires are not in general so good as his Epistles. His enmity is effeminate and petulant

from a sense of weakness, as his friendship was tender from a sense of gratitude. I do not like, for instance, his character of Chartres, or his characters of women. His delicacy often borders upon sickliness; his fastidiousness makes others fastidious. But his compliments are divine; they are equal in value to a house or an estate. Take the following. In addressing Lord Mansfield, he speaks of the grave as a scene,

Where Murray, long enough his country's pride,
Shall be no more than Tully, or than Hyde.

To Bolingbroke he says :

Why rail they then if but one wreath of mine,
Oh all-accomplished St. John, dock thy shrine?

Again, he has bequeathed this praise to Lord Cornbury :

Despise low thoughts, low gains:
Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains;
Be virtuous and be happy for your pains.

One would think (though there is no knowing) that a descendant of this nobleman, if there be such a person living, could hardly be guilty of a mean or paltry action.

The finest piece of personal satire in Pope (perhaps in the world) is his character of Addison; and this, it may be observed, is of a mixed kind, made up of his respect for the man, and a cutting sense of his failings. The other finest one is that of Buckingham, and the best part of that is the pleasurable:

Alas! how changed from him,
 That life of pleasure and that soul of whim,
 Gallant and gay, in Cliveden's proud alcove,
 The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love!

Among his happiest and most inimitable effusions are the *Epistles* to Arbuthnot and to Jervas the painter; amiable patterns of the delightful unconcerned life, blending ease with dignity, which poets and painters then led. Thus he says to Arbuthnot:

Why did I write? What sin to me unknown
 Dipp'd me in ink, my parents' or my own?
 As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
 I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.
 I left no calling for this idle trade,
 No duty broke, no father disobey'd:
 The muse but serv'd to ease some friend, not wife,
 To help me through this long disease, my life!
 To second, Arbuthnot! thy art and care,
 And teach the being you preserv'd to bear.

But why then publish? Granville the polite,
 And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;
 Well-natur'd Garth inflam'd with early praise,
 And Congreve lov'd, and Swift endur'd, my lays;
 The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield, read;
 E'en mitred Rochester would nod the head;
 And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before)
 With open arms receiv'd one poet more.
 Happy my studies, when by these approv'd!
 Happier their author, when by these belov'd!
 From these the world will judge of men and books,
 Not from the Burnets. Oldmixons, and Cooks.

I cannot help giving also the conclusion of the *Epistle to Jervas*:

Oh, lasting as those colours, may they shine,
 Free as thy stroke, yet faultless as thy line;
 New graces yearly, like thy works, display,
 Soft, without weakness, without glaring gay;
 Led by some rule, that guides, but not constrains;

And finish'd more through happiness than pains,
The kindred arts shall in their praise conspire,
One dip the pencil, and one string the lyre.
Yet should the Graces all thy figures place,
And breathe an air divine on ev'ry face;
Yet should the Muses bid my numbers roll
Strong as their charms, and gentle as their soul;
With Zeuxis' Helen thy Bridgewater vie.
And these be sung till Granville's Myra die:
Alas! how little from the grave we claim!
Thou but preserv'st a face, and I a name.

And shall we cut ourselves off from beauties like these with a theory? Shall we shut up our books, and seal up our senses, to please the dull spite and inordinate vanity of those 'who have eyes, but they see not, ears, but they hear not, and understandings, but they understand not', and go about asking our blind guides whether Pope was a poet or not? It will never do. Such persons, when you point out to them a fine passage in Pope, turn it off to something of the same sort in some other writer. Thus they say that the line, 'I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came', is pretty, but taken from that of Ovid—*Et quum conabar scribere, versus erat*. They are safe in this mode of criticism: there is no danger of any one's tracing their writings to the classics.

Pope's letters and prose writings neither take away from, nor add to, his poetical reputation. There is, occasionally, a littleness of manner, and an unnecessary degree of caution. He appears anxious to say a good thing in every word, as well as every sentence. They, however, give a very favourable idea of his moral character in all respects; and his letters to Atterbury, in his disgrace and exile, do equal

honour to both. If I had to choose, there are one or two persons, and but one or two, that I should like to have been, better than Pope!

Dryden was a better prose-writer, and a bolder and more varied versifier, than Pope. He was a more vigorous thinker, a more correct and logical declaimer, and had more of what may be called strength of mind than Pope; but he had not the same refinement and delicacy of feeling. Dryden's eloquence and spirit were possessed in a higher degree by others, and in nearly the same degree by Pope himself; but that by which Pope was distinguished was an essence which he alone possessed, and of incomparable value on that sole account. Dryden's Epistles are excellent, but inferior to Pope's, though they appear (particularly the admirable one to Congreve) to have been the model on which the latter formed his. His Satires are better than Pope's. His *Absalom and Achitophel* is superior, both in force of invective and discrimination of character, to any thing of Pope's in the same way. The character of Achitophel is very fine; and breathes, if not a sincere love for virtue, a strong spirit of indignation against vice.

Mac Flecknoe is the origin of the idea of *The Dunciad*; but it is less elaborately constructed, less feeble, and less heavy. The difference between Pope's satirical portraits and Dryden's appears to be this, in a good measure, that Dryden seems to grapple with his antagonists, and to describe real persons; Pope seems to refine upon them in his own mind, and to make them out just what he pleases, till they are not real characters, but the mere drivelling effusions of

his spleen and malice. Pope describes the thing, and then goes on describing his own description till he loses himself in verbal repetitions. Dryden recurs to the object often, takes fresh sittings of nature, and gives us new strokes of character as well as of his pencil. *The Hind and Panther* is an allegory as well as a satire; and so far it tells less home; the battery is not so point-blank. But, otherwise, it has more genius, vehemence, and strength of description, than any other of Dryden's works, not excepting the *Absalom and Achitophel*. It also contains the finest examples of varied and sounding versification. I will quote the following as an instance of what I mean. He is complaining of the treatment which the Papists, under James II, received from the church of England:

Besides these jolly birds, whose corpse impure
Repaid their commons with their salt manure,
Another farm he had behind his house,
Not overstocked, but barely for his use;
Wherein his poor domestic poultry fed,
And from his pious hand 'received their bread.'
Our pampered pigeons, with malignant eyes,
Beheld these inmates and their nurseries;
Though hard their fare, at evening, and at morn,
(A cruse of water, and an ear of corn),
Yet still they grudged that *modicum*, and thought
A sheaf in every single grain was brought.
Fain would they filch that little food away,
While unrestrained those happy gluttons prey;
And much they grieved to see so nigh their hall,
The bird that warned St. Peter of his fall;
That he should raise his mitred crest on high,
And clap his wings, and call his family
To sacred rites; and vex the ethereal powers
With midnight matins at uncivil hours;
Nay more, his quiet neighbours should molest
Just in the sweetness of their morning rest.

Beast of a bird! supinely when he might
 Lie snug and sleep, to rise before the light!
 What if his dull forefathers us'd that cry,
 Could he not let a bad example die?
 The world was fallen into an easier way;
 This age knew better than to fast and pray.
 Good sense in sacred worship would appear,
 So to begin as they might end the year.
 Such feats in former times had wrought the falls
 Of crowing chanticleers in cloister'd walls.
 Expell'd for this, and for their lands, they fled;
 And sister Partlet with her hooded head
 Was hooted hence, because she would not pray a-bed.

There is a magnanimity of abuse in some of these epithets, a fearless choice of topics of invective, which may be considered as the heroical in satire.

The *Annus Mirabilis* is a tedious performance; it is a tissue of far-fetched, heavy, lumbering conceits, and in the worst style of what has been denominated metaphysical poetry. His Odes in general are of the same stamp; they are the hard-strained offspring of a meagre, meretricious fancy. The famous *Ode on St. Cecilia* deserves its reputation; for, as a piece of poetical mechanism to be set to music, or recited in alternate strophe and antistrophe, with classical allusions, and flowing verse, nothing can be better. It is equally fit to be said or sung; it is not equally good to read. It is lyrical, without being epic or dramatic. For instance, the description of Bacchus:

The jolly god in triumph comes,
 Sound the trumpets, beat the drums;
 Flush'd with a purple grace,
 He shows his honest face,

does not answer, as it ought, to our idea of the god, returning from the conquest of India, with satyrs and wild beasts, that he had tamed, following in his train; crowned with vine leaves, and riding in a chariot drawn by leopards—such as we have seen him painted by Titian or Rubens! Lyrical poetry, of all others, bears the nearest resemblance to painting: it deals in hieroglyphics and passing figures, which depend for effect, not on the working out but on the selection. It is the dance and pantomime of poetry. In variety and rapidity of movement, the *Alexander's Feast* has all that can be required in this respect; it only wants loftiness and truth of character.

Dryden's plays are better than Pope could have written; for though he does not go out of himself by the force of imagination, he goes out of himself by the force of common-places and rhetorical dialogue. On the other hand, they are not so good as Shakespeare's; but he has left the best character of Shakespeare that has ever been written*.

* To begin, then, with Shakespeare: he was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient, poets had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it, too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat and insipid: his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious, swelling into

His alterations from Chaucer and Boccaccio show a greater knowledge of the taste of his readers, and power of pleasing them, than acquaintance with the genius of his authors. He ekes out the lameness of the verse in the former, and breaks the force of the passion in both. The *Tancred and Sigismunda* is the only general exception, in which, I think, he has fully retained, if not improved upon, the impassioned declamation of the original. The *Honorio* has none of the bewildered, dreary, preternatural effect of Boccaccio's story. Nor has the *Flower and the Leaf* anything of the enchanting simplicity and concentrated feeling of Chaucer's romantic fiction. Dryden, however, sometimes seemed to indulge himself as well as his readers, as in keeping entire that noble line in Palamon's address to Venus:

Thou gladder of the mount of Cithæron!

His Tales have been, upon the whole, the most popular of his works; and I should think that a translation of some of the other serious tales in Boccaccio and Chaucer, as that of *Isabella*, *The Falcon*, of *Constance*, *The Prioress's Tale*, and others, if executed with taste and spirit, could not fail to succeed in the present day.

It should appear, in tracing the history of our literature, that poetry had, at the period

bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is present to him. No man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter Viburna Cupressi.

of which we are speaking, in general declined, by successive gradations, from the poetry of imagination, in the time of Elizabeth, to the poetry of fancy (to adopt a modern distinction) in the term of Charles I, and again from the poetry of fancy to that of wit, as in the reign of Charles II and Queen Anne. It degenerated into the poetry of mere common-places, both in style and thought, in the succeeding reigns; as in the latter part of the last century, it was transformed, by means of the French Revolution, into the poetry of paradox.

Of Donne I know nothing but some beautiful verses to his wife, dissuading her from accompanying him on his travels abroad, and some quaint riddles in verse which the Sphinx could not unravel.

Waller still lives in the name of Sacharissa; and his lines on the death of Oliver Cromwell show that he was a man not without genius and strength of thought.

Marvel is a writer of nearly the same period, and worthy of a better age. Some of his verses are harsh as the words of Mercury; others musical as is Apollo's lute. Of the latter kind are his boat-song, his description of a fawn, and his lines to Lady Vere. His lines prefixed to *Paradise Lost* are by no means the most favourable specimen of his powers.

Butler's *Hudibras* is a poem of more wit than any other in the language. The rhymes have as much genius in them as the thoughts; but there is no story in it, and but little humour. Humour is the making others act or talk absurdly and unconsciously; wit is the pointing out and

ridiculing that absurdity consciously, and with more or less ill-nature. The fault of Butler's poem is not that it has too much wit, but that it has not an equal quantity of other things. One would suppose that the starched manners and sanctified grimace of the times in which he lived would of themselves have been sufficiently rich in ludicrous incidents and characters; but they seem rather to have irritated his spleen than to have drawn forth his powers of picturesque imitation. Certainly, if we compare *Hudibras* with *Don Quixote* in this respect, it seems rather a meagre and unsatisfactory performance.

Rochester's poetry is the poetry of wit combined with the love of pleasure, of thought with licentiousness. His extravagant, heedless levity has a sort of passionate enthusiasm in it; his contempt for everything that others respect almost amounts to sublimity. His poem upon *Nothing* is itself no trifling work. His epigrams were the bitterest, the least laboured, and the truest, that ever were written.

Sir John Suckling was of the same mercurial stamp, but with a greater fund of animal spirits; as witty, but less malicious. His *Ballad on a Wedding* is perfect in its kind, and has a spirit of high enjoyment in it, of sportive fancy, a liveliness of description, and a truth of nature, that never were surpassed. It is superior to either Gay or Prior; for, with all their *naïveté* and terseness, it has a Shakspearian grace and luxuriance about it which they could not have reached.

Denham and Cowley belong to the same period, but were quite distinct from each other: the one

was grave and prosing, the other melancholy and fantastical. There are a number of good lines and good thoughts in the *Cooper's Hill*. And in Cowley there is an inexhaustible fund of sense and ingenuity, buried in inextricable conceits, and entangled in the cobwebs of the schools. He was a great man, not a great poet. But I shall say no more on this subject. I never wish to meddle with names that are sacred, unless when they stand in the way of things that are more sacred.

Withers is a name now almost forgotten, and his works seldom read; but his poetry is not unfrequently distinguished by a tender and pastoral turn of thought; and there is one passage of exquisite feeling, describing the consolations of poetry in the following terms:

She doth tell me where to borrow
Comfort in the midst of sorrow;
Makes the desolatest place *
To her presence be a grace;
And the blackest discontents
Be her fairest ornaments,
In my former days of bliss
Her divine skill taught me this,
That from every thing I saw
I could some invention draw;
And raise pleasure to her height,
Through the meanest object's sight;—
By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rusteling,
By a daisy whose leaves spread
Shut when Titan goes to bed;
Or a shady bush or tree,
She could more infuse in me
Than all Nature's beauties can
In some other wiser man.

* Written in the Fleet Prison.

By her help I also now
Make this churlish place allow
Some things that may sweeten gladness
In the very gall of sadness.
The dull liveness, the black shade,
That these hanging vaults have made,
The strange music of the waves,
Beating on these hollow caves,
This black den which rocks emboss,
Overgrown with eldest moss,
The rude portals that give light
More to terror than delight,
This my chamber of neglect,
Wall'd about with disrespect,
From all these, and this dull air,
A fit object for despair,
She hath taught me by her might
To draw comfort and delight.
Therefore, thou best earthly bliss,
I will cherish thee for this.
Poesie, thou sweet'st content
That e'er Heaven to mortals lent,
Though they as a trifle leave thee,
Whose dull thoughts cannot conceive thee,
Though thou be to them a scorn,
That to nought but earth are born,
Let my life no longer be
Than I am in love with thee.
Though our wise ones call thee madness,
Let me never taste of sadness
If I love not thy maddest fits
Above all their greatest wits.
And though some, too seeming holy,
Do account thy raptures folly,
Thou dost teach me to contemn
What makes knaves and fools of them.

LECTURE V

ON THOMSON AND COWPER

THOMSON, the kind-hearted Thomson, was the most indolent of mortals and of poets. But he was also one of the best both of mortals and of poets. Dr Johnson makes it his praise, that he wrote 'no line which dying he would wish to blot'. Perhaps a better proof of his honest simplicity, and inoffensive goodness of disposition, would be that he wrote no line which any other person living would wish that he should blot. Indeed, he himself wished, on his death-bed, formally to expunge his dedication of one of *The Seasons* to that finished courtier, and candid biographer of his own life, Bubb Doddington. As critics, however, not as moralists, we might say, on the other hand 'Would he had blotted a thousand!' The same suavity of temper, and sanguine warmth of feeling, which threw such a natural grace and genial spirit of enthusiasm over his poetry, was also the cause of his inherent vices and defects. He is affected through carelessness, pompous from unsuspecting simplicity of character. He is frequently pedantic and ostentatious in his style, because he had no consciousness of these vices in himself. He mounts upon stilts, not out of vanity, but indolence. He

seldom writes a good line but he makes up for it by a bad one. He takes advantage of all the most trite and mechanical common-places of imagery and diction as a kindly relief to his Muse, and as if he thought them quite as good, and likely to be quite as acceptable to the reader, as his own poetry. He did not think the difference worth putting himself to the trouble of accomplishing. He had too little art to conceal his art; or did not even seem to know that there was any occasion for it. His art is as naked and undisguised as his nature; the one is as pure and genuine as the other is gross, gaudy, and meretricious. All that is admirable in *The Seasons* is the emanation of a fine natural genius, and sincere love of his subject, unforced, unstudied, that comes uncalled for, and departs unbidden. But he takes no pains, uses no self-correction; or, if he seems to labour, it is worse than labour lost. His genius 'cannot be constrained by mastery'. The feeling of nature, of the changes of the seasons, was in his mind; and he could not help conveying this feeling to the reader by the mere force of spontaneous expression; but if the expression did not come of itself, he left the whole business to chance; or, willing to evade, instead of encountering, the difficulties of his subject, fills up the intervals of true inspiration with the most vapid and worthless materials, pieces out a beautiful half-line with a bombastic allusion, or overloads an exquisitely natural sentiment or image with a cloud of painted, pompous, cumbrous phrases, like the shower of roses, in which he represents the Spring, his own lovely, fresh, and innocent Spring, as descending to the earth:

Come, gentle Spring! ethereal Mildness! come,
And from the bosom of yon dropping cloud,
While music wakes around, veil'd in a shower
Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend.

Who, from such a flimsy, round-about, unmeaning commencement as this, would expect the delightful, unexaggerated, home-felt descriptions of natural scenery, which are scattered in such unconscious profusion through this and the following cantos! For instance, the very next passage is crowded with a set of striking images:

And see where surly Winter passes off
Far to the north, and calls his ruffian blasts:
His blasts obey, and quit the howling hill,
The shatter'd forest, and the ravag'd vale;
While softer gales succeed, at whose kind touch
Dissolving snows in livid torrents lost,
The mountains lift their green heads to the sky.
As yet the trembling year is unconfirm'd,
And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,
Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets
Deform the day delightless; so that scarce
The bittern knows his time with bill ingulph'd
To shake the sounding marsh, or from the shore
The plovers when to scatter o'er the heath,
And sing their wild notes to the list'ning waste

Thomson is the best of our descriptive poets; for he gives most of the poetry of natural description. Others have been quite equal to him, or have surpassed him, as Cowper for instance, in the picturesque part of his art, in marking the peculiar features and curious details of objects; no one has yet come up to him in giving the sum total of their effects, their varying influences on the mind. He does not go into the *minutiae* of a landscape, but describes the vivid impression which the whole makes upon his own imagination;

and thus transfers the same unbroken, unimpaired impression to the imagination of his readers. The colours with which he paints seem yet wet and breathing, like those of the living statue in the *Winter's Tale*. Nature, in his descriptions, is seen growing around us, fresh and lusty as in itself. We feel the effect of the atmosphere, its humidity or clearness, its heat or cold, the glow of summer, the gloom of winter, the tender promise of the spring, the full overshadowing foliage, the declining pomp and deepening tints of autumn. He transports us to the scorching heat of vertical suns, or plunges us into the chilling horrors and desolation of the frozen zone. We hear the snow drifting against the broken casement without, and see the fire blazing on the hearth within. The first scattered drops of a vernal shower patter on the leaves above our heads, or the coming storm resounds through the leafless groves. In a word, he describes not to the eye alone, but to the other senses, and to the whole man. He puts his heart into his subject, writes as he feels, and humanises whatever he touches. He makes all his descriptions teem with life and vivifying soul. His faults were those of his style—of the author and the man; but the original genius of the poet, the pith and marrow of his imagination, the fine natural mould in which his feelings were bedded, were too much for him to counteract by neglect, or affectation, or false ornaments. It is for this reason, that he is, perhaps, the most popular of all our poets, treating of a subject that all can understand, and in a way that is interesting to all alike, to the ignorant or the refined, because he gives

back the impression which the things themselves make upon us in nature. 'That', said a man of genius, seeing a little shabby, soiled copy of Thomson's *Seasons* lying on the window-seat of an obscure country alehouse, 'That is true fame!'

It has been supposed by some that the *Castle of Indolence* is Thomson's best poem; but that is not the case. He has in it, indeed, poured out the whole soul of indolence, diffuse, relaxed, supine, dissolved into a voluptuous dream; and surrounded himself with a set of objects and companions in entire unison with the listlessness of his own temper. Nothing can well go beyond the descriptions of these inmates of the place, and their luxurious, pampered way of life--of him who came among them like 'a burnished fly in month of June', but soon left them on his heedless way; and him,

For whom the merry bells had rung, I ween,
If in this nook of quiet bells had ever been.

The in-door quiet and cushioned ease, where 'all was one full-swelling bed'; the out-of-door stillness, broken only by 'the stock-dove's plaint amid the forest deep',

That drowsy rustled to the sighing gale

are in the most perfect and delightful keeping. But, still, there are no passages in this exquisite little production of sportive ease and fancy, equal to the best of those in *The Seasons*. Warton, in his *Essay on Pope*, was the first to point out and do justice to some of these; for instance, to the description of the effects of the contagion

among our ships at Carthagea—‘of the frequent corse heard nightly plunged amid the sullen waves’, and to the description of the pilgrims lost in the deserts of Arabia. This last passage, profound and striking as it is, is not free from those faults of style which I have already noticed :

Preath’d hot
 From all the boundless furnace of the sky,
 And the wide-glitt’ring waste of burning sand,
 A suffocating wind the pilgrim smites
 With instant death. Patient of thirst and toil,
 Son of the desert, ev’n the camel feels
 Shot through his wither’d heart the fiery blast.
 Or from the black-red ether, bursting broad,
 Sallies the sudden whirlwind. Straight the sands,
 Commov’d around, in gath’ring eddies play;
 Nearer, and nearer still, they dark’ning come,
 Till with the gen’ral all-involving storm
 Swept up, the whole continuous wilds arise,
 And by their noon-day fount dejected thrown,
 Or sunk at night in sad disastrous sleep,
 Beneath descending hills the caravan
 Is buried deep. In Cairo’s crowded streets,
 Th’ impatient merchant, wond’ring, waits in vain;
 And Mecca saddens at the long delay.

There are other passages of equal beauty with these; such as that of the hunted stag, followed by ‘the inhuman rout’,

That from the shady depth
 Expel him, circling through his ev’ry shift.
 He sweeps the forest oft, and, sobbing, sees
 The glades mild op’ning to the golden day,
 Where in kind contest with his butting friends
 He wont to struggle, or his loves enjoy.

The whole of the description of the frozen zone, in the *Winter*, is perhaps even finer and more thoroughly felt, as being done from early associations, than that of the torrid zone in his

Summer. Anything more beautiful than the following account of the Siberian exiles is, I think, hardly to be found in the whole range of poetry :

There through the prison of unbounded wilds,
Barr'd by the hand of nature from escape,
Wide roams the Russian exile. Nought around
Strikes his sad eye but deserts lost in snow,
And heavy-loaded groves, and solid floods,
That stretch athwart the solitary vast
Their icy horrors to the frozen main;
And cheerless towns far distant, never bless'd,
Save when its annual course the caravan
Bends to the golden coast of rich Cathay,
With news of human kind.

The feeling of loneliness, of distance, of lingering, slow-revolving years of pining expectation, of desolation within and without the heart, was never more finely expressed than it is here.

The account which follows of the employments of the Polar night—of the journeys of the natives by moonlight, drawn by rein-deer, and of the return of Spring in Lapland,

Where pure Niemi's fairy mountains rise,
And fring'd with roses, Tenglio rolls his stream,

is equally picturesque and striking in a different way. The traveller lost in the snow is a well known and admirable dramatic episode. I prefer, however, giving one example of our author's skill in painting common domestic scenery, as it will bear a more immediate comparison with the style of some later writers on such subjects. It is of little consequence what passage we take.

The following description of the first setting in of winter is, perhaps, as pleasing as any:

Through the hush'd air the whitening shower descends,
At first thin wav'ring, till at last the flakes
Fall broad and wide, and fast, dimming the day
With a continual flow. The cherish'd fields
Put on their winter-robe of purest white:
'Tis brightness all, save where the new snow melts
Along the mazy current. Low the woods
Bow their hoar head; and ere the languid Sun,
Faint from the West emits his ev'ning ray,
Earth's universal face, deep hid, and chill,
Is one wide dazzling waste, that buries wide
The works of man. Drooping, the lab'rer-ox
Stands cover'd o'er with snow, and then demands
The fruit of all his toil. The fowls of heav'n,
Tam'd by the cruel season, crowd around
The winnowing store, and claim the little boon
Which Providence assigns them. One alone,
The red-breast, sacred to the household gods,
Wisely regardful of the embroiling sky,
In joyless fields and thorny thickets leaves
His shivering mates, and pays to trusted man
His annual visit. Half-afraid, he first
Against the window beats; then, brisk, alights
On the warm hearth; then, hopping o'er the floor,
Eyes all the smiling family askance,
And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is:
Till, more familiar grown, the table-crums
Attract his slender feet. The foodless wilds
Pour forth their brown inhabitants. The hare,
Though timorous of heart, and hard beset
By death in various forms, dark snares and dogs.
And more un pitying men, the garden seeks,
Urg'd on by fearless want. The bleating kind
Eye the bleak heav'n, and next the glistening earth,
With looks of dumb despair; then, sad dispers'd,
Dig for the wither'd herb through heaps of snow.

It is thus that Thomson always gives a *moral sense* to nature.

Thomson's blank verse is not harsh, nor utterly

untuneable; but it is heavy and monotonous; it seems always labouring uphill. The selections which have been made from his works in Enfield's *Speaker*, and other books of extracts, do not convey the most favourable idea of his genius or taste; such as *Palemon and Lavinia*, *Damon and Musidora*, *Celadon and Amelia*. Those parts of any author which are most liable to be stitched in worsted, and framed and glazed, are not by any means always the best. The moral descriptions and reflections in *The Seasons* are in an admirable spirit, and written with great force and fervour.

His poem on *Liberty* is not equally good: his Muse was too easy and good-natured for the subject, which required as much indignation against unjust and arbitrary power, as complacency in the constitutional monarchy, under which, just after the expulsion of the Stuarts and the establishment of the House of Hanover, in contempt of the claims of hereditary pretenders to the throne, Thomson lived. Thomson was but an indifferent hater; and the most indispensable part of the love of liberty has unfortunately hitherto been the hatred of tyranny. Spleen is the soul of patriotism, and of public good; but you would not expect a man who has been seen eating peaches off a tree with both hands in his waistcoat pockets, to be 'overrun with the spleen', or to heat himself needlessly about an abstract proposition.

His plays are liable to the same objection. They are never acted, and seldom read. The author could not, or would not, put himself out of his way, to enter into the situations and passions of others, particularly of a tragic kind.

The subject of *Tancred and Sigismunda*, which is taken from a serious episode in *Gil Blas*, is an admirable one, but poorly handled; the ground may be considered as still unoccupied.

Cowper, whom I shall speak of in this connection, lived at a considerable distance of time after Thomson; and had some advantages over him, particularly in simplicity of style, in a certain precision and minuteness of graphical description, and in a more careful and leisurely choice of such topics only as his genius and peculiar habits of mind prompted him to treat of. *The Task* has fewer blemishes than *The Seasons*; but it has not the same capital excellence, the 'unbought grace' of poetry, the power of moving and infusing the warmth of the author's mind into that of the reader. If Cowper had a more polished taste, Thomson had, beyond comparison, a more fertile genius, more impulsive force, a more entire forgetfulness of himself in his subject. If, in Thomson, you are sometimes offended with the slovenliness of the author by profession, determined to get through his task at all events; in Cowper you are no less dissatisfied with the finicalness of the private gentleman, who does not care whether he completes his work or not; and, whatever he does, is evidently more solicitous to please himself than the public. There is an effeminacy about him, which shrinks from, and repels, common and hearty sympathy. With all his boasted simplicity and love of the country, he seldom launches out into general descriptions of nature: he looks at her over his clipped hedges, and from his well-swept garden-walks; or if he makes

a bolder experiment now and then, it is with an air of precaution, as if he were afraid of being caught in a shower of rain, or of not being able, in case of any untoward accident, to make good his retreat home. He shakes hands with nature with a pair of fashionable gloves on, and leads 'his Vashti' forth to public view with a look of consciousness and attention to etiquette, as a fine gentleman hands a lady out to dance a minuet. He is delicate to fastidiousness, and glad to get back, after a romantic adventure with 'crazy Kate, a party of gypsies, or a little child on a common, to the drawing-room and the ladies again, to the sofa and the tea-kettle -- No, I beg his pardon, not to the singing, well-scoured teakettle, but to the polished and loud-hissing urn. His walks and arbours are kept clear of worms and snails, with as much an appearance of *petit-maitreship* as of humanity. He has some of the sickly sensibility and pampered refinements of Pope; but then Pope prided himself in them: whereas, Cowper affects to be all simplicity and plainness. He had neither Thomson's love of the unadorned beauties of nature, nor Pope's exquisite sense of the elegances of art. He was, in fact, a nervous man, afraid of trusting himself to the seductions of the one, and ashamed of putting forward his pretensions to an intimacy with the other: but to be a coward is not the way to succeed either in poetry, in war, or in love! Still, he is a genuine poet, and deserves all his reputation. His worst vices are amiable weaknesses, elegant trifling. Though there is a frequent dryness, timidity, and jejune-ness in his manner, he has left a number of

pictures of domestic comfort and social refinement, as well as of natural imagery and feeling, which can hardly be forgotten but with the language itself. Such, among others, are his memorable description of the post coming in, that of the preparations for tea in a winter's evening in the country, of the unexpected fall of snow, of the frosty morning (with the fine satirical transition to the Empress of Russia's palace of ice), and, most of all, the winter's walk at noon. Every one of these may be considered as distinct studies, or highly-finished cabinet-pieces arranged without order or coherence. I shall be excused for giving the last of them, as what has always appeared to me one of the most feeling, elegant, and perfect specimens of this writer's manner:

The night was winter in his roughest mood;
The morning sharp and clear. But now at noon
Upon the southern side of the slant hills,
And where the woods fence off the northern blast,
The season smiles, resigning all its rage,
And has the warmth of May. The vault is blue,
Without a cloud, and white without a speck
The dazzling splendour of the scene below.
Again the harmony comes o'er the vale;
And through the trees I view th'embattled tow'r,
Whence all the music. I again perceive
The soothing influence of the wafted strains,
And settle in soft musings as I tread
The walk, still verdant, under oaks and elms,
Whose outspread branches overarch the glade.
The roof, though moveable through all its length,
As the wind sways it, has yet well suffic'd,
And, intercepting in their silent fall
The frequent flakes, has kept a path for me.
No noise is here, or none that hinders thought.
The redbreast warbles still, but is content
With slender notes, and more than half suppress'd.
Pleas'd with his solitude, and flitting light
From spray to spray, where'er he rests he shakes

From many a twig the pendent drops of ice
That tinkle in the wither'd leaves below.
Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,
Charms more than silence. Meditation here
May think down hours to moments. Here the heart
May give a useful lesson to the head,
And Learning wiser grow without his books.
Knowledge and Wisdom, far from being one,
Have oft-times no connection. Knowledge dwells
In heads replete with thoughts of other men;
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.
Books are not seldom talismans and spells,
By which the magic art of shrewder wits
Holds an unthinking multitude enthral'd.
Some to the fascination of a name
Surrender judgment, hood-wink'd. Some the style
Infatuates, and through labyrinths and wilds
Of error leads them, by a tune entranc'd.
While sloth seduces more, too weak to bear
The insupportable fatigue of thought,
And swallowing therefore, without pause or choice,
The total grist unsifted, husks and all.
But trees, and rivulets whose rapid course
Defies the check of winter, haunts of deer,
And sheep-walks populous with bleating lambs,
And lanes, in which the primrose ere her time
Peeps through the moss that clothes the hawthorn root,
Deceive no student. Wisdom there, and truth,
Not shy, as in the world, and to be won
By slow solicitation, seize at once
The roving thought, and fix it on themselves.

His satire is also excellent. It is pointed and forcible, with the polished manners of the gentleman, and the honest indignation of the virtuous man. His religious poetry, except where it takes a tincture of controversial heat, wants elevation and fire. His Muse had not a seraph's wing. I might refer, in illustration of this opinion, to the laboured anticipation of the Millennium at the end of the sixth book. He could describe a piece of shell-work as well as any modern

poet: but he could not describe the New Jerusalem so well as John Bunyan; nor are his verses on Alexander Selkirk so good as *Robinson Crusoe*. The one is not so much like a vision, nor is the other so much like the reality.

The first volume of Cowper's poems has, however, been less read than it deserved. The comparison in these poems of the proud and humble believer to the peacock and the pheasant, and the parallel between Voltaire and the poor cottager, are exquisite pieces of eloquence and poetry, particularly the last:

Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
Pillow and bobbins all her little store;
Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
Shuffling her threads about the live-long day,
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night,
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light;
She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,
Has little understanding, and no wit,
Receives no praise; but, though her lot be such,
(Toilsome and indigent) she renders much:
Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew;
And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes
Her title to a treasure in the skies.

O happy peasant! O unhappy bard!
His the mere tinsel, hers the rich reward;
He prais'd, perhaps, for ages yet to come,
She never heard of half a mile from home:
He lost in errors his vain heart prefers,
She safe in the simplicity of hers.

His character of Whitfield, in the poem on Hope, is one of the most spirited and striking things. It is written *con amore*.

But if, unblameable in word and thought,
A man arise, a man whom God has taught,
With all Elijah's dignity of tone,
And all the love of the beloved John,

To storm the citadels they build in air,
To smite the untemper'd wall ('tis death to spare),
To sweep away all refuges of lies,
And place, instead of quirks themselves devise,
Lama Sabachthani before their eyes;
To show that without Christ all gain is loss,
All hope despair that stands not on his cross;
Except a few his God may have impress'd,
A tenfold phrensy seizes all the rest.

These lines were quoted, soon after their appearance, by the Monthly Reviewers, to show that Cowper was no poet, though they afterwards took credit to themselves for having been the first to introduce his verses to the notice of the public. It is not a little remarkable that these same critics regularly damned, at its first coming out, every work which has since acquired a standard reputation with the public. Cowper's verses on his mother's picture, and his lines to Mary, are some of the most pathetic that ever were written. His stanzas on the loss of the Royal George have a masculine strength and feeling beyond what was usual with him. The story of John Gilpin has perhaps given as much pleasure to as many people as anything of the same length that ever was written.

His life was an unhappy one. It was embittered by a morbid affection, and by his religious sentiments. Nor are we to wonder at this, or bring it as a charge against religion; for it is the nature of the poetical temperament to carry everything to excess, whether it be love, religion, pleasure, or pain, as we may see in the case of Cowper and of Burns, and to find torment or rapture in that in which others merely find a resource from *ennui*, or a relaxation from common occupation.

There are two poets still living who belong to the same class of excellence, and of whom I shall here say a few words; I mean Crabbe, and Robert Bloomfield, the author of *The Farmer's Boy*. As a painter of simple natural scenery, and of the still-life of the country, few writers have more undeniable and unassuming pretensions than the ingenious and self-taught poet last mentioned. Among the sketches of this sort I would mention, as equally distinguished for delicacy, faithfulness, and *naïveté*, his description of lambs racing, of the pigs going out an acorning, of the boy sent to feed his sheep before the break of day in winter; and I might add the innocently told story of the poor bird-boy, who in vain through the live-long day expects his promised companions at his hut, to share his feast of roasted sloes with him, as an example of that humble pathos in which this author excels. The fault indeed of his genius is that it is too humble; his Muse has something not only rustic, but menial in her aspect. He seems afraid of elevating nature, lest she should be ashamed of him. Bloomfield very beautifully describes the lambs in spring-time as racing round the hillocks of green turf: Thomson, in describing the same image, makes the mound of earth the remains of an old Roman encampment. Bloomfield never gets beyond his own experience; and that is somewhat confined. He gives the simple appearance of nature, but he gives it naked, shivering, and unclothed with the drapery of a moral imagination. His poetry has much the effect of the first approach of spring, 'while yet the year is unconfirmed', where a few tender buds venture forth here

and there, but are chilled by the early frosts and nipping breath of poverty. It should seem from this and other instances that have occurred within the last century, that we cannot expect from original genius alone, without education, in modern and more artificial periods, the same bold and independent results as in former periods. And one reason appears to be that, though such persons, from whom we might at first expect a restoration of the good old times of poetry, are not encumbered and enfeebled by the trammels of custom, and the dull weight of other men's ideas; yet they are oppressed by the consciousness of a want of the common advantages which others have; are looking at the tinsel finery of the age, while they neglect the rich unexplored mine in their own breasts; and, instead of setting an example for the world to follow, spend their lives in aping, or in the despair of aping, the hackneyed accomplishments of their inferiors. Another cause may be, that original genius alone is not sufficient to produce the highest excellence without a corresponding state of manners, passions, and religious belief: that no single mind can move in direct opposition to the vast machine of the world around it; that the poet can do no more than stamp the mind of his age upon his works; and that all that the ambition of the highest genius can hope to arrive at, after the lapse of one or two generations, is the perfection of that more refined and effeminate style of studied elegance and adventitious ornament, which is the result, not of nature, but of art. In fact, no other style of poetry has succeeded, or seems likely to succeed, in the present day. The public taste hangs like a

millstone round the neck of all original genius that does not conform to established and exclusive models. The writer is not only without popular sympathy, but without a rich and varied mass of materials for his mind to work upon, and assimilate unconsciously to itself; his attempts at originality are looked upon as affectation, and in the end degenerate into it from the natural spirit of contradiction, and the constant uneasy sense of disappointment and undeserved ridicule. But to return.

Crabbe is, if not the most natural, the most literal of our descriptive poets. He exhibits the smallest circumstances of the smallest things. He gives the very costume of meanness; the non-essentials of every trifling incident. He is his own landscape-painter, and engraver too. His pastoral scenes seem pricked on paper in little dotted lines. He describes the interior of a cottage like a person sent there to distrain for rent. He has an eye to the number of arms in an old worm-eaten chair, and takes care to inform himself, and the reader, whether a joint-stool stands upon three legs or upon four. If a settle by the fire-side stands awry, it gives him as much disturbance as a tottering world; and he records the rent in a ragged counterpane as an event in history. He is equally curious in his back-grounds and in his figures. You know the christian and surnames of every one of his heroes, the dates of their achievements, whether on a Sunday or a Monday, their place of birth and burial, the colour of their hair, and whether they squinted or not. He takes an inventory of the human heart, exactly in the same manner

as of the furniture of a sick room; his sentiments have very much the air of fixtures; he gives you the petrification of a sigh, and carves a tear to the life in stone. Almost all his characters are tired of their lives, and you heartily wish them dead. They remind one of anatomical preservations; or may be said to bear the same relation to actual life that a stuffed cat in a glass-case does to the real one purring on the hearth; the skin is the same, but the life and the sense of heat is gone. Crabbe's poetry is like a museum, or curiosity-shop; everything has the same posthumous appearance, the same inanimateness and identity of character. If Bloomfield is too much of the Farmer's Boy, Crabbe is too much of the parish beadle, an overseer of the country poor. He has no delight beyond the walls of a workhouse, and his officious zeal would convert the world into a vast infirmary. He is a kind of Ordinary, not of Newgate, but of nature. His poetical morality is taken from Burn's *Justice*, or the Statutes against Vagrants. He sets his own imagination in the stocks, and his Muse, like Malvolio, 'wears cruel garters'. He collects all the petty vices of the human heart, and superintends, as in a panopticum, a select circle of rural malefactors. He makes out the poor to be as bad as the rich—a sort of vermin for the others to hunt down and trample upon, and this he thinks a good piece of work. With him there are but two moral categories, riches and poverty, authority and dependence. His parish apprentice, Richard Monday, and his wealthy baronet, Sir Richard Monday, of Monday-place, are the same individ-

ual—the extremes of the same character, and of his whole system. ‘The latter end of his Commonwealth does not forget the beginning’. But his parish ethics are the very worst model for a State: any thing more degrading and helpless cannot well be imagined. He exhibits just the contrary view of human life to that which Gay has done in his *Beggar’s Opera*. In a word, Crabbe is the only poet who has attempted and succeeded in the *still life* of tragedy: who gives the stagnation of hope and fear—the deformity of vice without the temptation—the pain of sympathy without the interest—and who seems to rely, for the delight he is to convey to his reader, on the truth and accuracy with which he describes only what is disagreeable.

The best descriptive poetry is not, after all, to be found in our descriptive poets. There are set descriptions of the flowers, for instance, in Thomson, Cowper, and others; but none equal to those in Milton’s *Lycidas*, and in *The Winter’s Tale*.

We have few good pastorals in the language. Our manners are not Arcadian; our climate is not an eternal spring; our age is not the age of gold. We have no pastoral-writers equal to Theocritus, nor any landscapes like those of Claude Lorraine. The best parts of Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar* are two fables, Mother Hubbard’s Tale, and the Oak and the Briar; which last is as splendid a piece of oratory as any to be found in the records of the eloquence of the British senate! Browne, who came after Spenser, and Withers, have left some pleasing allegorical poems of this kind. Pope’s are as full of senseless finery, and trite affectation, as if a peer of

the realm were to sit for his picture, with a crook and cocked-hat on, smiling with an insipid air of no meaning, between nature and fashion. Sir Philip Sydney's *Arcadia* is a lasting monument of perverted power; where an image of extreme beauty, as that of 'the shepherd boy piping as though he should never be old', peeps out once in a hundred folio pages, amidst heaps of intricate sophistry and scholastic quaintness. It is not at all like Nicholas Poussin's picture, in which he represents some shepherds wandering out in a morning of the spring, and coming to a tomb with this inscription—'I also was an Arcadian!' Perhaps the best pastoral in the language is that prose-poem, Walton's *Complete Angler*. That well-known work has a beauty and romantic interest equal to its simplicity, and arising out of it. In the description of a fishing-tackle you perceive the piety and humanity of the author's mind. It is to be doubted whether Sannazarius's *Piscatory Eclogues* are equal to the scenes described by Walton on the banks of the river Lea. He gives the feeling of the open air: we walk with him along the dusty road-side, or repose on the banks of the river under a shady tree: and, in watching for the finny prey, imbibe what he beautifully calls 'the patience and simplicity of poor honest fishermen'. We accompany them to their inn at night, and partake of their simple but delicious fare; while Maud, the pretty milk-maid, at her mother's desire, sings the classical ditties of the poet Marlow; 'Come live with me, and be my love'. Good cheer is not neglected in this work, any more than in Homer, or any

other history that sets a proper value on the good things of this life. The prints in *The Complete Angler* give an additional reality and interest to the scenes it describes. While Tottenham Cross shall stand, and longer, thy work, amiable and happy old man, shall last! —It is in the notes to it that we find that character of ‘a fair and happy milk-maid’, by Sir Thomas Overbury, which may vie in beauty and feeling with Chaucer’s character of Griselda:

A fair and happy milk-maid is a country wench that is so far from making herself beautiful by art, that one look of her’s is able to put all face-physic out of countenance. She knows a fair look is but a dumb orator to commend virtue, therefore minds it not. All her excellences stand in her so silently as if they had stolen upon her without her knowledge. The lining of her apparel (which is herself) is far better than outsides of tissue; for though she be not arrayed in the spoil of the silk-worm, she is decked in innocency, a far better wearing. She doth not, with lying long in bed, spoil both her complexion and conditions. Nature hath taught her too immoderate sleep is rust to the soul: she rises therefore with chanticleer, her dame’s clock, and at night makes the lamb her curfew. Her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of June, like a new-made haycock. She makes her hand hard with labour, and her heart soft with pity; and when winter evenings fall early (sitting at her merry wheel) she sings a defiance to the giddy wheel of Fortune. She doth all things with so sweet a grace, it seems ignorance will not suffer her to do ill, being her mind is to do well. She bestows her year’s wages at next fair: and, in choosing her garments, counts no bravery in the world like decency. The garden and the bee-hive are all her physick and chirurgery, and she lives the longer for’t. She dares go alone, and unfold sheep in the night, and fears no manner of ill, because she means none: yet, to say the truth, she is never alone, for she is still accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts, and prayers, but short ones; yet they have their efficacy, in that they are not palled with ensuing idle cogitations. Lastly, her dreams are so chaste

that she dare tell them; only a Friday's dream is all her superstition; that she conceals for fear of anger. Thus lives she; and all her care is she may die in the spring-time, to have store of flowers stuck upon her winding-sheet.

The love of the country has been sung by poets, and echoed by philosophers; but the first have not attempted, and the last have been greatly puzzled to account for it. I do not know that anyone has ever explained satisfactorily the true source of this feeling, or of that soothing emotion which the sight of the country or a lively description of rural objects hardly ever fails to infuse into the mind. Some have ascribed this feeling to the natural beauty of the objects themselves; others to the freedom from care, the silence and tranquillity, which scenes of retirement afford; others to the healthy and innocent employments of a country life; others to the simplicity of country manners, and others to a variety of different causes; but none to the right one. All these, indeed, have their effect; but there is another principal one which has not been touched upon, or only slightly glanced at. I will not, however, imitate. Mr Horne Tooke, who after enumerating seventeen different definitions of the verb, and laughing at them all as deficient and nugatory, at the end of two quarto volumes does not tell us what the verb really is, and has left posterity to pluck out 'the heart of his mystery'. I will say at once what it is that distinguishes this interest from others, and that is its *abstractedness*. The interest we feel in human nature is exclusive, and confined to the individual; the interest we feel in external nature is common, and

transferable from one object to all others of the same class. Thus :

Rousseau in his *Confessions* relates that, when he took possession of his room at Annecy, he found that he could see 'a little spot of green' from his window, which endeared his situation the more to him because, he says, it was the first time he had had this object constantly before him since he left Boissy, the place where he was at school when a child*. Some such feeling as that here described will be found lurking at the bottom of all our attachments of this sort. Were it not for the recollections habitually associated with them, natural objects could not interest the mind in the manner they do. No doubt, the sky is beautiful, the clouds sail majestically along its bosom; the sun is cheering; there is something exquisitely graceful in the manner in which a plant or tree puts forth its branches; the motion with which they bend and tremble in the evening breeze is soft and lovely; there is music in the babbling of a brook; the view from the top of a mountain is full of grandeur; nor can we behold the ocean with indifference. Or, as the Minstrel sweetly sings:

Oh how canst thou renounce the boundless store
Of charms which Nature to her votary yields!
The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,
The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields;
All that the genial ray of morning gilds,
And all that echoes to the song of even,

* Pope also declares that he had a particular regard for an old post which stood in the court-yard before the house where he was brought up.

All that the mountain's sheltering bosom shields,
And all the dread magnificence of heaven,
Oh, how canst thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven!

It is not, however, the beautiful and magnificent alone that we admire in Nature; the most insignificant and rudest objects are often found connected with the strongest emotions; we become attached to the most common and familiar images, as to the face of a friend whom we have long known, and from whom we have received many benefits. It is because natural objects have been associated with the sports of our childhood, with air and exercise, with our feelings in solitude, when the mind takes the strongest hold of things, and clings with the fondest interest to whatever strikes its attention; with change of place, the pursuit of new scenes, and thoughts of distant friends; it is because they have surrounded us in almost all situations, in joy and in sorrow, in pleasure and in pain; because they have been one chief source and nourishment of our feelings, and a part of our being, that we love them as we do ourselves.

There is, generally speaking, the same foundation for our love of Nature as for all our habitual attachments, namely, association of ideas. But this is not all. That which distinguishes this attachment from others is the transferable nature of our feelings with respect to physical objects; the associations connected with any one object extending to the whole class. Our having been attached to any particular person does not make us feel the same attachment to the next person we may chance to meet; but,

if we have once associated strong feelings of delight with the objects of natural scenery, the tie becomes indissoluble, and we shall, ever after, feel the same attachment to other objects of the same sort. I remember, when I was abroad, the trees, and grass, and wet leaves, rustling in the walks of the Tuilleries, seemed to be as much English, to be as much the same trees and grass, that I had always been used to, as the sun shining over my head was the same sun which I saw in England; the faces only were foreign to me. Whence comes this difference? It arises from our always imperceptibly connecting the idea of the individual with man, and only the idea of the class with natural objects. In the one case, the external appearance or physical structure is the least thing to be attended to; in the other, it is everything. The springs that move the human form, and make it friendly or adverse to me, lie hid within it. There is an infinity of motives, passions, and ideas, contained in that narrow compass, of which I know nothing, and in which I have no share. Each individual is a world to himself, governed by a thousand contradictory and wayward impulses. I can, therefore, make no inference from one individual to another; nor can my habitual sentiments, with respect to any individual, extend beyond himself to others. A crowd of people presents a disjointed, confused, and unsatisfactory appearance to the eye; because there is nothing to connect the motley assemblage into one continuous or general impression, unless when there is some common object of interest to fix their attention, as in

the case of a full pit at the play-house. The same principle will also account for that feeling of littleness, vacuity, and perplexity, which a stranger feels on entering the streets of a populous city. Every individual he meets is a blow to his personal identity. Every new face is a teasing, unanswered riddle. He feels the same wearisome sensation, in walking from Oxford Street to Temple Bar, as a person would do who should be compelled to read through the first leaf of all the volumes in a library. But it is otherwise with respect to nature. A flock of sheep is not a contemptible, but a beautiful, sight. The greatest number and variety of physical objects do not puzzle the will, or distract the attention, but are massed together under one uniform and harmonious feeling. The heart reposes in greater security on the immensity of Nature's works, 'expatiates freely there', and finds elbow-room and breathing space. We are always at home with Nature. There is neither hypocrisy, caprice, nor mental reservation in her favours. Our intercourse with her is not liable to accident or change, suspicion or disappointment; she smiles on us still the same. A rose is always sweet, a lily is always beautiful: we do not hate the one, nor envy the other. If we have once enjoyed the cool shade of a tree, and been lulled into a deep repose by the sound of a brook running at its foot, we are sure that wherever we can find a shady stream we can enjoy the same pleasure again; so that, when we imagine these objects, we can easily form a mystic personification of the friendly power that inhabits them, Dryad

or Naiad, offering its cool fountain or its tempting shade. Hence the origin of the Grecian mythology. All objects of the same kind being the same, not only in their appearance, but in their practical uses, we habitually confound them together under the same general idea; and whatever fondness we may have conceived for one is immediately placed to the common account. The most opposite kinds and remote trains of feeling gradually go to enrich the same sentiment; and in our love of nature there is all the force of individual attachment, combined with the most airy abstraction. It is this circumstance which gives that refinement, expansion, and wild interest, to feelings of this sort, when strongly excited, which every one must have experienced who is a true lover of nature.

It is the same setting sun that we see and remember year after year, through summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. The moon that shines above our heads, or plays through the chequered shade, is the same moon that we used to read of in Mrs Radcliffe's romances. We see no difference in the trees first covered with leaves in the spring. The dry reeds rustling on the side of a stream, the woods swept by the loud blast, the dark massy foliage of autumn, the grey trunks and naked branches of the trees in winter, the sequestered copse, and wide-extended heath, the glittering sunny showers, and December snows, are still the same, or accompanied with the same thoughts and feelings: there is no object, however trifling or rude, that does not in some mood or other find its way into the heart, as a link in the chain

of our living being; and this it is that makes good that saying of the poet:

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Thus nature is a kind of universal home, and every object it presents to us an old acquaintance with unaltered looks; for there is that consent and mutual harmony among all her works, one undivided spirit pervading them throughout, that, to him who has well acquainted himself with them, they speak always the same well-known language, striking on the heart, amidst unquiet thoughts and the tumult of the world, like the music of one's native tongue heard in some far-off country.

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began,
So is it now I am a man,
So shall it be when I grow old and die.
The child's the father of the man,
And I would have my years to be
Linked each to each by natural piety.

The daisy that first strikes the child's eye, in trying to leap over his own shadow, is the same flower that with timid upward glance implores the grown man not to tread upon it. Rousseau, in one of his botanical excursions, meeting with the periwinkle, fell upon his knees, crying out—*Ah! voilà de la pervenche!* It was because he had, thirty years before, brought home the same flower with him in one of his rambles with Madame de Warens, near Chambery. It struck him as the same identical little

blue flower that he remembered so well; and thirty years of sorrow and bitter regret were effaced from his memory. That, or a thousand other flowers of the same name, were the same to him, to the heart, and to the eye; but there was but one Madame de Warens in the world, whose image was never absent from his thoughts; with whom flowers and verdure sprung up beneath his feet, and without whom all was cold and barren in nature and in his own breast. The cuckoo, 'that wandering voice', that comes and goes with the spring, mocks our ears with one note from youth to age; and the lapwing, screaming round the traveller's path, repeats for ever the same sad story of Tereus and Philomel!

LECTURE VI

ON SWIFT, YOUNG, GRAY, COLLINS, ETC.

I SHALL, in the present Lecture, go back to the age of Queen Anne, and endeavour to give a cursory account of the most eminent of our poets of whom I have not already spoken, from that period to the present.

The three principal poets among the wits of Queen Anne's reign, next to Pope, were Prior, Swift, and Gay. Parnell, though a good-natured, easy man, and a friend to poets and the Muses, was himself little more than an occasional versifier; and Arbuthnot, who had as much wit as the best of them, chose to show it in prose, and not in verse. He had a very notable share in the immortal *History of John Bull*, and the inimitable and praiseworthy *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*.—There has been a great deal said and written about the plagiarisms of Sterne; but the only real plagiarism he has been guilty of (if such theft were a crime), is in taking Tristram Shandy's father from Martin's, the elder Scriblerus. The original idea of the character, that is, of the opinionated, captious old gentleman, who is pedantic, not from profession, but choice, belongs to Arbuthnot. Arbuthnot's style is distinguished

from that of his contemporaries, even by a greater degree of terseness and conciseness. He leaves out every superfluous word; is sparing of connecting particles, and introductory phrases; uses always the simplest forms of construction; and is more a master of the idiomatic peculiarities and internal resources of the language than almost any other writer. There is a research in the choice of a plain, as well as of an ornamented or learned, style; and, in fact, a great deal more. Among common English words, there may be ten expressing the same thing with different degrees of force and propriety, and only one of them the very word we want, because it is the only one that answers exactly with the idea we have in our minds. Each word in familiar use has a set of associations, and shades of meaning, attached to it, and distinguished from each other by inveterate custom; and it is in having the whole of these at our command, and in knowing which to choose, as they are called for by the occasion, that the perfection of a pure conversational prose-style consists. But in writing a florid and artificial style, neither the same range of invention, nor the same quick sense of propriety—nothing but learning is required. If you know the words, and their general meaning, it is sufficient: it is impossible you should know the nicer inflections of signification, depending on an endless variety of application, in expressions borrowed from a foreign or dead language. They all impose upon the ear alike, because they are not familiar to it; the only distinction left is between the pompous and the

plain; the *sesquipedalia verba* have this advantage, that they are all of one length; and any words are equally fit for a learned style, so that we have never heard them before. Themistocles thought that the same sounding epithets could not suit all subjects, as the same dress does not fit all persons. The style of our modern prose-writers is very fine in itself; but it wants variety of inflection and adaptation; it hinders us from seeing the differences of the things it undertakes to describe.

What I have here insisted on will be found to be the leading distinction between the style of Swift, Arbuthnot, Steele, and the other writers of the age of Queen Anne, and the style of Dr Johnson, which succeeded to it. The one is English, and the other is not. The writers first mentioned, in order to express their thoughts, looked about them for the properest word to convey any idea, that the language which they spoke, and which their countryman understood, afforded: Dr Johnson takes the first English word that offers, and, by translating it at a venture into the first Greek or Latin word he can think of, only retaining the English termination, produces an extraordinary effect upon the reader, by much the same sort of mechanical process that Trim converted the old jack-boots into a pair of new mortars.

Dr Johnson was a lazy learned man, who liked to think and talk better than to read or write; who, however, wrote much and well, but too often by rote. His long compound Latin phrases required less thought, and took up more room, than others. What shows the

facilities afforded by this style of imposing generalization is, that it was instantly adopted with success by all those who were writers by profession, or who were not; and that, at present, we cannot see a lottery puff, or a quack advertisement pasted against a wall, that is not perfectly Johnsonian in style. Formerly, the learned had the privilege of translating their notions into Latin; and a great privilege it was, as it confined the reputation and emoluments of learning to themselves. Dr Johnson may be said to have naturalised this privilege, by inventing a sort of jargon translated half-way out of one language into the other, which raised the Doctor's reputation, and confounded all ranks in literature.

In the short period above alluded to, authors professed to write as other men spoke; every body now affects to speak as authors write; and anyone who retains the use of his mother tongue, either in writing or conversation, is looked upon as a very illiterate character.

Prior and Gay belong, in the characteristic excellences of their style, to the same class of writers with Suckling, Rochester, and Sedley: the former imbibed most of the licentious levity of the age of Charles II, and carried it on beyond the Revolution under King William. Prior has left no single work equal to Gay's *Fables*, or *The Beggar's Opera*. But in his lyrical and fugitive pieces he has shown even more genius, more playfulness, more mischievous gaiety. No one has exceeded him in the laughing grace with which he glances at a subject that will not bear examining, with which he gently hints

at what cannot be directly insisted on, with which he half conceals, and half draws aside, the veil from some of the Muses' nicest mysteries. His Muse is, in fact, a giddy wanton flirt, who spends her time in playing at snap-dragon and blind-man's buff, who tells what she should not, and knows more than she tells. She laughs at the tricks she shows us, and blushes, or would be thought to do so, at what she keeps concealed. Prior has translated several of Fontaine's *Tales* from the French; and they have lost nothing in the translation, either of their wit or malice. I need not name them: but the one I like the most is that of Cupid in search of Venus' doves. No one could insinuate a knavish plot, a tender point, a loose moral, with such unconscious archness, and careless raillery, as if he gained new self-possession and adroitness from the perplexity and confusion into which he throws scrupulous imaginations, and knew how to seize on all the ticklish parts of his subject, from their involuntarily shrinking under his grasp. Some of his imitations of Boileau's servile addresses to Louis XIV, which he has applied with a happy mixture of wit and patriotic enthusiasm to King William, or as he familiarly calls him, to,

Little Will, the scourge of France,
No Godhead, but the first of men,

are excellent, and show the same talent for *double-entendre* and the same gallantry of spirit, whether in the softer lyric, or the more lively heroic. Some of Prior's *bon mots* are the best that are recorded. His serious poetry, as his

Solomon, is as heavy as his familiar style was light and agreeable. His moral Muse is a Magdalen, and should not have obtruded herself on public view. *Henry and Emma* is a paraphrase of the old ballad of *The Nutbrown Maid*, and not so good as the original. In short, as we often see in other cases where men thwart their own genius, Prior's sentimental and romantic productions are mere affectation, the result not of powerful impulse or real feeling, but of a consciousness of his deficiencies, and a wish to supply their place by labour and art.

Gay was sometimes grosser than Prior, not systematically, but inadvertently—from not being so well aware of what he was about; nor was there the same necessity for caution, for his grossness is by no means so seductive or inviting.

Gay's *Fables* are certainly a work of great merit, both as to the quantity of invention implied, and as to the elegance and facility of the execution. They are, however, spun out too long; the descriptions and narrative are too diffuse and desultory; and the moral is sometimes without point. They are more like Tales than fables. The best are, perhaps, *The Hare with Many Friends*, *The Monkeys*, and *The Fox at the Point of Death*. His *Pastorals* are pleasing and poetical. But his capital work is his *Beggar's Opera*. It is indeed a masterpiece of wit and genius, not to say of morality. In composing it, he chose a very unpromising ground to work upon, and he has prided himself in adorning it with all the graces, the precision, and brilliancy of

style. It is a vulgar error to call this a vulgar play. So far from it that I do not scruple to say that it appears to me one of the most refined productions in the language. The elegance of the composition is in exact proportion to the coarseness of the materials: by 'happy alchemy of mind', the author has extracted an essence of refinement from the dregs of human life, and turns its very dross into gold. The scenes, characters, and incidents are, in themselves, of the lowest and most disgusting kind: but, by the sentiments and reflections which are put into the mouths of highwaymen, turnkeys, their mistresses, wives, or daughters, he has converted this motley group into a set of fine gentlemen and ladies, satirists, and philosophers. He has also effected this transformation without once violating probability, or 'o'erstepping the modesty of nature'. In fact, Gay has turned the tables on the critics; and, by the assumed license of the mock-heroic style, has enabled himself to *do justice to nature*, that is, to give all the force, truth, and locality of real feeling to the thoughts and expressions, without being called to the bar of false taste and affected delicacy. The extreme beauty and feeling of the song, 'Woman is like the fair flower in its lustre', are only equalled by its characteristic propriety and *naïveté*. Polly describes her lover going to the gallows with the same touching simplicity, and with all the natural fondness of a young girl in her circumstances, who sees, in his approaching catastrophe, nothing but the misfortunes and the personal accomplishments of the object of her affections. 'I

see him sweeter than the nosegay in his hand; the admiring crowd lament that so lovely a youth should come to an untimely end: even butchers weep; and Jack Ketch refuses his fee rather than consent to tie the fatal knot'. The preservation of the character and costume is complete. It has been said by a great authority — 'There is some soul of goodness in things evil', and the *Beggar's Opera* is a good-natured but instructive comment on this text. The poet has thrown all the gaiety and sunshine of the imagination, all the intoxication of pleasure, and the vanity of despair, round the short-lived existence of his heroes; while Peachum and Lockitt are seen in the back-ground, parcelling out their months and weeks between them. The general view exhibited of human life is of the most subtle and abstracted kind. The author has, with great felicity, brought out the good qualities and interesting emotions almost inseparable from the lowest conditions; and, with the same penetrating glance, has detected the disguises which rank and circumstances lend to exalted vice. Every line in this sterling comedy sparkles with wit, and is fraught with the keenest sarcasm. The very wit, however, takes off from the offensiveness of the satire; and I have seen great statesmen, very great statesmen, heartily enjoying the joke, laughing most immoderately at the compliments paid to them, as not much worse than pickpockets and cut-throats in a different line of life, and pleased, as it were, to see themselves humanised by some sort of fellowship with their kind. Indeed, it may be said that the moral of the piece is *to show the vulgarity of vice*;

or that the same violations of integrity and decorum, the same habitual sophistry in palliating their want of principle, are common to the great and powerful, with the meanest and most contemptible of the species. What can be more convincing than the arguments used by these would-be politicians to show that, in hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery, they do not come up to many of their betters? The exclamation of Mrs Peachum, when her daughter marries Macheath, ‘Hussy, hussy, you will be as ill used, and as much neglected, as if you had married a lord’, is worth all Miss Hannah More’s laboured invectives on the laxity of the manners of high life!

I shall conclude this account of Gay with his verses on Sir Richard Blackmore, which may serve at once as a specimen of his own manner, and as a character of a voluminous contemporary poet, who was admired by Mr Locke, and knighted by King William III.

See who ne’er was nor will be half-read,
 Who first sung Arthur, then sung Alfred;
 Praised great Eliza in God’s anger,
 Till all true Englishmen cried, ‘Hang her!’—
 Maul’d human wit in one thick satire;
 Next in three books spoil’d human nature:
 Undid Creation at a jerk,
 And of Redemption made damn’d work.
 Then took his Muse at once, and dipt her
 Full in the middle of the Scripture,
 What wonders there the man, grown old, did!
 Sternhold himself he out-Sternholded.
 Made David seem so mad and freakish,
 All thought him just what thought King Achish
 No mortal read his Solomon
 But judg’d Re’boam his own son.
 Moses he serv’d as Moses Pharaoh,

And Deborah as she Siserah;
 Made Jeremy full sore to cry,
 And Job himself curse God and die.
 What punishment all this must follow?
 Shall Arthur use him like King Tollo?
 Shall David as Uriah slay him?
 O! dextrous Deborah Siserah him?
 No!—none of these! Heaven spare his life!
 But send him, honest Job, thy wife!

Gay's *Trivia*, or *Art of Walking the Streets*, is as pleasant as walking the streets must have been at the time when it was written. His ballad of *Black Eyed Susan* is one of the most delightful that can be imagined; nor do I see that it is a bit the worse for Mr Jekyll's parody on it.

Swift's reputation as a poet has been in a manner obscured by the greater splendour, by the natural force and inventive genius of his prose writings; but if he had never written either the *Tale of a Tub*, or *Gulliver's Travels*, his name merely as a poet would have come down to us, and have gone down to posterity, with well-earned honours. His imitations of Horace, and still more his verses on his own death, place him in the first rank of agreeable moralists in verse. There is not only a dry humour, an exquisite tone of irony, in these productions of his pen, but there is a touching, unpretending pathos, mixed up with the most whimsical and eccentric strokes of pleasantry and satire. His description of the morning in London, and of a City shower, which were first published in the *Tatler*, are among the most delightful of the contents of that very delightful work. Swift shone as one of the most sens-

ible of the poets; he is also distinguished as one of the most nonsensical of them. No man has written so many lack-a-daisical, slip-shod, tedious, trifling, foolish, fantastical verses as he, which are so little an imputation on the wisdom of the writer; and which, in fact, only show his readiness to oblige others, and to forget himself. He has gone so far as to invent a new stanza of fourteen and sixteen syllable lines for Mary the cookmaid to vent her budget of nothings, and for Mrs Harris to gossip with the deaf old housekeeper. Oh, when shall we have such another Rector of Laracor!—The *Tale of a Tub* is one of the most masterly compositions in the language, whether for thought, wit, or style. It is so capital and undeniable a proof of the author's talents, that Dr Johnson, who did not like Swift, would not allow that he wrote it. It is hard that the same performance should stand in the way of a man's promotion to a bishopric, as wanting gravity, and at the same time be denied to be his, as having too much wit. It is a pity the Doctor did not find out some graver author, for whom he felt a critical kindness, on whom to father this splendid, but unacknowledged, production.—Dr Johnson could not deny that *Gulliver's Travels* were his; he therefore disputed their merits, and said that, after the first idea of them was conceived, they were easy to execute; all the rest followed mechanically. I do not know how that may be; but the mechanism employed is something very different from any that the author of *Rasselas* was in the habit of bringing to bear on such occasions. There is

nothing more futile, as well as invidious, than this mode of criticising a work of original genius. Its greatest merit is supposed to be in the invention; and you say, very wisely, that it is not *in the execution*. You might as well take away the merit of the invention of the telescope, by saying that, after its uses were explained and understood, any ordinary eyesight could look through it. Whether the excellence of *Gulliver's Travels* is in the conception or the execution, is of little consequence; the power is somewhere, and it is a power that has moved the world. The power is not that of big words, and vaunting common places. Swift left these to those who wanted them; and has done what his acuteness and intensity of mind alone could enable any one to conceive or to perform. His object was to strip empty pride and grandeur of the imposing air which external circumstances throw around them; and, for this purpose, he has cheated the imagination of the illusions which the prejudices of sense and of the world put upon it, by reducing every thing to the abstract predicament of size. He enlarges or diminishes the scale, as he wishes, to show the insignificance or the grossness of our over-weening self-love. That he has done this with mathematical precision, with complete presence of mind and perfect keeping, in a manner that comes equally home to the understanding of the man and of the child, does not take away from the merit of the work or the genius of the author. He has taken a new view of human nature, such as a being of a higher sphere might take of it;

he has torn the scales from off his moral vision; he has tried an experiment upon human life, and sifted its pretensions from the alloy of circumstances; he has measured it with a rule, has weighed it in a balance, and found it, for the most part, wanting and worthless, in substance and in show. Nothing solid, nothing valuable is left in his system but virtue and wisdom. What a libel is this upon mankind! What a convincing proof of misanthropy! What presumption and what *malice prepense*, to show men what they are, and to teach them what they ought to be! What a mortifying stroke, aimed at national glory, is that unlucky incident of Gulliver's wading across the channel and carrying off the whole fleet of Blefuscu! After that, we have only to consider which of the contending parties was in the right. What a shock to personal vanity is given in the account of Gulliver's nurse Glumdalclitch! Still, notwithstanding the disparagement to her personal charms, her good nature remains the same amiable quality as before. I cannot see the harm, the misanthropy, the immoral and degrading tendency of this. The moral lesson is as fine as the intellectual exhibition is amusing. It is an attempt to tear off the mask of imposture from the world; and nothing but imposture has a right to complain of it. It is, indeed, the way with our quacks in morality to preach up the dignity of human nature, to pamper pride and hypocrisy with the idle mockeries of the virtues they pretend to, and which they have not: but it was not Swift's way to cant morality, or anything else;

nor did his genius prompt him to write unmeaning panegyrics on mankind!

I do not, therefore, agree with the estimate of Swift's moral or intellectual character given by an eminent critic, who does not seem to have forgotten the party politics of Swift. I do not carry my political resentments so far back: I can, at this time of day, forgive Swift for having been a Tory. I feel little disturbance (whatever I might think of them) at his political sentiments, which died with him, considering how much else he has left behind him of a more solid and imperishable nature! If he had, indeed, (like some others) merely left behind him the lasting infamy of a destroyer of his country, or the shining example of an apostate from liberty, I might have thought the case altered.

The determination with which Swift persisted in a preconceived theory savoured of the morbid affection of which he died. There is nothing more likely to drive a man mad than the being unable to get rid of the idea of his distinction between right and wrong, and an obstinate, constitutional preference of the true to the agreeable. Swift was not a Frenchman. In this respect he differed from Rabelais and Voltaire. They have been accounted the three greatest wits in modern times; but their wit was of a peculiar kind in each. They are little beholden to each other; there is some resemblance between Lord Peter in the *Tale of a Tub*, and Rabelais' Friar John; but in general they are all three authors of a substantive character in themselves. Swift's wit (particularly in his

chief prose works) was serious, saturnine, and practical; Rabelais' was fantastical and joyous; Voltaire's was light, sportive, and verbal. Swift's wit was the wit of sense; Rabelais', the wit of nonsense; Voltaire's, of indifference to both. The ludicrous in Swift arises out of his keen sense of impropriety, his soreness and impatience of the least absurdity. He separates, with a severe and caustic air, truth from falsehood, folly from wisdom, 'shews vice her own image, scorn her own feature'; and it is the force, the precision, and the honest abruptness with which the separation is made, that excites our surprise, our admiration, and laughter. He sets a mark of reprobation on that which offends good sense and good manners, which cannot be mistaken, and which holds it up to our ridicule and contempt ever after. His occasional disposition to trifling (already noticed) was a relaxation from the excessive earnestness of his mind. *Indignatio facit versus.* His better genius was his spleen. It was the biting acrimony of his temper that sharpened his other faculties. The truth of his perceptions produced the pointed coruscations of his wit; his playful irony was the result of inward bitterness of thought; his imagination was the product of the literal, dry, incorrigible tenaciousness of his understanding. He endeavoured to escape from the persecution of realities into the regions of fancy, and invented his Lilliputians, and Brobdignagians, Yahoos, and Houynhymms, as a diversion to the more painful knowledge of the world around him: *they* only made him laugh, while men and women made him angry. His feverish impatience made him

view the infirmities of that great baby the world with the same scrutinizing glance and jealous irritability that a parent regards the failings of its offspring; but, as Rousseau has well observed, parents have not on this account been supposed to have more affection for other people's children than their own. In other respects, and except from the sparkling effervescence of his gall, Swift's brain was as 'dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage'. He hated absurdity—Rabelais loved it, exaggerated it with supreme satisfaction, luxuriated in its endless varieties, rioted in nonsense, 'reigned there and revelled'. He dwelt on the absurd and ludicrous for the pleasure they gave him, not for the pain. He lived upon laughter, and died laughing. He indulged his vein, and took his full swing of folly. He did not baulk his fancy or his readers. His wit was to him 'as riches fineless', he saw no end of his wealth in that way, and set no limits to his extravagance: he was communicative, prodigal, boundless, and inexhaustible. His were the Saturnalia of wit, the riches and the royalty, the health and long life. He is intoxicated with gaiety, mad with folly. His animal spirits drown him in a flood of mirth; his blood courses up and down his veins like wine. His thirst of enjoyment is as great as his thirst of drink; his appetite for good things of all sorts is unsatisfied, and there is a never-ending supply. *Discourse is dry*; so they moisten their words in their cups, and relish their dry jests with plenty of Botargos and dried neats' tongues. It is like Camacho's wedding in *Don Quixote*, where Sancho ladled out whole pullets and

fat geese from the soup-kettles at a pull. The flagons are set a running, their tongues wag at the same time, and their mirth flows as a river. How Friar John roars and lays about him in the vineyard! How Panurge whines in the storm, and how dexterously he contrives to throw the sheep overboard! How much Pantagruel behaves like a wise king! How Gargantua mewls, and pules, and slabbers his nurse, and demeans himself most like a royal infant! what provinces he devours! what seas he drinks up! How he eats, drinks, and sleeps—sleeps, eats, and drinks! The style of Rabelais is no less prodigious than his matter. His words are of marrow, unctuous, dropping fatness. He was a mad wag, the king of good fellows, and prince of practical philosophers!

Rabelais was a Frenchman of the old school—Voltaire of the new. The wit of the one arose from an exuberance of enjoyment—of the other, from an excess of indifference, real or assumed. Voltaire had no enthusiasm for one thing or another; he made light of every thing. In his hands all things turn to chaff and dross, as the pieces of silver money in *The Arabian Nights* were changed by the hands of the enchanter into little dry crumbling leaves! He is a Parisian. He never exaggerates, is never violent: he treats things with the most provoking *sang froid*; and expresses his contempt by the most indirect hints, and in the fewest words, as if he hardly thought them worth even his contempt. He retains complete possession of himself and of his subject. He does not effect his purpose by the eagerness of his blows, but

by the delicacy of his tact. The poisoned wound he inflicted was so fine as scarcely to be felt, till it rankled and festered in its 'mortal consequences'. His callousness was an excellent foil for the antagonists he had mostly to deal with. He took knaves and fools on his shield well. He stole away its cloak from grave imposture. If he reduced other things below their true value, making them seem worthless and hollow, he did not degrade the pretensions of tyranny and superstition below their true value, by making them seem utterly worthless and hollow, as contemptible as they were odious. This was the service he rendered to truth and mankind! His *Candide* is a masterpiece of wit. It has been called 'the dull product of a scoffer's pen'. It is, indeed, 'the product of a scoffer's pen'; but after reading *The Excursion*, few people will think it *dull*. It is in the most perfect keeping, and without any appearance of effort. Every sentence tells, and the whole reads like one sentence. There is something sublime in Martin's sceptical indifference to moral good and evil. It is the repose of the grave. It is better to suffer this living death than a living martyrdom. 'Nothing can touch him further'. The moral of *Candide* (such as it is) is the same as that of *Rasselas*: the execution is different. Voltaire says, 'A great book is a great evil'. Dr Johnson would have laboured this short apophthegm into a voluminous commonplace. Voltaire's traveller (in another work) being asked 'whether he likes black or white mutton best', replies that 'he is indifferent, provided it is tender'. Dr Johnson

did not get at a conclusion by so short a way as this. If Voltaire's licentiousness is objected to me, I say, let it be placed to its true account, the manners of the age and court in which he lived. The lords and ladies of the bedchamber in the reign of Louis XV found no fault with the immoral tendency of his writings. Why then should our modern *purists* quarrel with them?—But to return.

Young is a gloomy epigrammatist. He has abused great powers both of thought and language. His moral reflections are sometimes excellent; but he spoils their beauty by overloading them with a religious horror, and at the same time giving them all the smart turns and quaint expressions of an enigma or repartee in verse. The well-known lines on *Procrastination* are in his best manner:

Be wise to-day; 'tis madness to defer;
 Next day the fatal precedent will plead;
 Thus on, till wisdom is push'd out of life.
 Procrastination is the thief of time;
 Year after year it steals, till all are fled,
 And to the mercies of a moment leaves
 The vast concerns of an eternal scene.

Of man's miraculous mistakes, this bears
 The palm, 'That all men are about to live',
 For ever on the brink of being born.
 All pay themselves the compliment to think
 They, one day, shall not drivel; and their pride
 On this reversion takes up ready praise;
 At least, their own; their future selves applauds;
 How excellent that life they ne'er will lead!
 Time lodg'd in their own hands is Folly's vails:
 That lodg'd in Fate's, to Wisdom they consign;
 The thing they can't but purpose they postpone
 'Tis not in Folly not to scorn a fool;

And scare in human Wisdom to do more.
 All promise is poor dilatory man,
 And that through every stage. When young, indeed,
 In full content, we, sometimes, nobly rest,
 Un-anxious for ourselves; and only wish,
 As duteous sons, our fathers were more wise.
 At thirty man suspects himself a fool;
 Knows it at forty, and reforms his plan;
 At fifty chides his infamous delay,
 Pushes his prudent purpose to resolve;
 In all the magnanimity of thought,
 Resolves, and re-resolves; then dies the same.

And why? Because he thinks himself immortal.
 All men think all men mortal but themselves;
 Themselves, when some alarming shock of fate
 Strikes through their wounded hearts the sudden dread;
 But their hearts wounded, like the wounded air,
 Soon close; where, past the shaft, no trace is found.
 As from the wing no scar the sky retains;
 The parted wave no furrow from the keel;
 So dies in human hearts the thought of death.
 Ev'n with the tender tear which nature sheds
 O'er those we love, we drop it in their grave.

His *Universal Passion* is a keen and powerful satire; but the effort takes from the effect, and oppresses attention by perpetual and violent demands upon it. His tragedy of *The Revenge* is monkish and scholastic. *Zanga* is a vulgar caricature of Iago. The finest lines in it are the burst of triumph at the end, when his revenge is completed:

Let Europe and her pallid sons go weep,
 Let Afric on her hundred thrones rejoice, etc.

Collins is a writer of a very different stamp, who had perhaps less general power of mind than Young; but he had that true *vivida vis*, that genuine inspiration, which alone can give

birth to the highest efforts of poetry. He leaves stings in the minds of his readers, certain traces of thought and feeling, which never wear out, because nature had left them in his own mind. He is the only one of the minor poets of whom, if he had lived, it cannot be said that he might not have done the greatest things. The germ is there. He is sometimes affected, unmeaning, and obscure; but he also catches rich glimpses of the bowers of Paradise, and has lofty aspirations after the highest seats of the Muses. With a great deal of tinsel and splendid patch-work, he has not been able to hide the solid sterling ore of genius. In his best works there is an attic simplicity, a pathos, and fervour of imagination, which make us the more lament that the efforts of his mind were at first depressed by neglect and pecuniary embarrassment, and at length buried in the gloom of an unconquerable and fatal malady. How many poets have gone through all the horrors of poverty and contempt, and ended their days in moping melancholy or moody madness!

We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness.

Is this the fault of themselves, of nature in tempering them of too fine a clay, or of the world, that spurner of living, and patron of dead merit? Read the account of Collins—with hopes frustrated, with faculties blighted, at last, when it was too late for himself or others, receiving the deceitful favours of relenting Fortune, which served only to throw their sunshine on his decay, and to light him

to an early grave. He was found sitting with every spark of imagination extinguished, and with only the faint traces of memory and reason left—with only one book in his room, the Bible; ‘but that’, he said, ‘was the best’. A melancholy damp hung like an unwholesome mildew upon his faculties—a canker had consumed the flower of his life. He produced works of genius, and the public regarded them with scorn; he aimed at excellence that should be his own, and his friends treated his efforts as the wanderings of fatuity. The proofs of his capacity are, his *Ode on Evening*, his *Ode on the Passions* (particularly the fine personification of Hope), his *Ode to Fear*, the *Dirge in Cymbeline*, the *Lines on Thomson’s Grave*, and his *Eclogues*, parts of which are admirable. But, perhaps, his *Ode on the Poetical Character* is the best of all. A rich distilled perfume emanates from it, like the breath of genius; a golden cloud envelopes it; a honeyed paste of poetic diction encrusts it, like the candied coat of the auricula. His *Ode to Evening* shows equal genius in the images and versification. The sounds steal slowly over the ear, like the gradual coming on of evening itself:

If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song
May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,
Like thy own solemn springs,
Thy springs and dying gales,

O nymph reserv’d, while now the bright-haired sun
Sits on yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts,
With brede ethereal wove,
O’erhang his wavy bed;

Now air is hush'd, save where the weak-ey'd bat,
 With short shrill shriek, flits by on leathern wing,
 Or where the beetle winds
 His small but sullen horn,

As oft he rises midst the twilight path,
 Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum.
 Now teach me, maid compos'd,
 To breathe some soften'd strain,

Whose numbers, stealing through thy darkling vale,
 May not unseemly with its stillness suit,
 As, musing slow, I hail
 Thy genial, lov'd return!

For when thy folding star arising shows
 His paly circlet, at his warning lamp
 The fragrant Hours and Elves,
 Who slept in flow'rs the day,

And many a nymph who wreathes her brows with sedge,
 And sheds the fresh'ning dew, and, lovelier still,
 The pensive Pleasures sweet,
 Prepare thy shadowy car;

Then lead, calm Votress, where some sheety lake
 Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallow'd pile,
 Or upland fallows grey,
 Reflect its last cool gleam.

But when chill blust'ring winds, or driving rain,
 Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut,
 That from the montain's side
 Views wilds and swelling floods,

And hamlets brown, and dim discover'd spires,
 And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
 Thy dewy fingers draw
 The gradual dusky veil.

While Spring shall pour his show'rs, as oft he wont,
 And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve!
 While Summer loves to sport
 Beneath thy lingering light;

While fallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves;
 Or Winter yelling through the troublous air,
 Affrights thy shrinking train,
 And rudely rends thy robes;

So long, sure-found beneath the sylvan shed,
 Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lipp'd Health,
 Thy gentlest influence own,
 And hymn thy favourite name.

Hammond, whose poems are bound up with Collins's, in Bell's pocket edition, was a young gentleman, who appears to have fallen in love about the year 1740, and who translated Tibullus into English verse to let his mistress and the public know of it.

I should conceive that Collins had a much greater poetical genius than Gray: he had more of that fine madness which is inseparable from it, of its turbid effervescence, of all that pushes it to the verge of agony or rapture. Gray's *Pindaric Odes* are, I believe, generally given up at present: they are stately and pedantic, a kind of methodical, borrowed phrenzy. But I cannot so easily give up, nor will the world be in any haste to part with, his *Elegy in a Country Church-yard*: it is one of the most classical productions that ever was penned by a refined and thoughtful mind, moralising on human life. Mr Coleridge (in his *Literary Life*) says that his friend Mr Wordsworth had undertaken to show that the language of the *Elegy* is unintelligible: it has, however, been understood! The *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College* is more mechanical and common-place; but it touches on certain strings about the heart, that vibrate in unison with it to our latest breath. No

one ever passes by Windsor's 'stately heights', or sees the distant spires of Eton College below, without thinking of Gray. He deserves that we should think of him; for he thought of others, and turned a trembling, ever-watchful ear to 'the still sad music of humanity'. His letters are inimitably fine. If his poems are sometimes finical and pedantic, his prose is quite free from affectation. He pours his thoughts out upon paper as they arise in his mind; and they arise in his mind without pretence, or constraint, from the pure impulse of learned leisure and contemplative indolence. He is not here on stilts or in buckram; but smiles in his easy chair, as he moralises through the loopholes of retreat, on the bustle and rareeshow of the world, or on 'those reverend bedlams, colleges, and schools!' He had nothing to do but to read and to think, and to tell his friends what he read and thought. His life was a luxurious thoughtful dream. 'Be mine', he says in one of his Letters, 'to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon'. And in another, to show his contempt for action and the turmoils of ambition, he says to some one, 'Don't you remember Lords —— and ——, who are now great statesmen, little dirty boys playing at cricket? For my part, I do not feel a bit wiser, or bigger, or older than I did then'. What an equivalent for not being wise or great, to be always young! What a happiness never to lose or gain anything in the game of human life, by being never any thing more than a looker-on!

How different from Shenstone, who only wanted

to be looked at: who withdrew from the world to be followed by the crowd, and courted popularity by affecting privacy! His *Letters* show him to have lived in a continual fever of petty vanity, and to have been a finished literary coquet. He seems always to say, ‘You will find nothing in the world so amiable as Nature and me: come, and admire us’. His poems are indifferent and tasteless, except his *Pastoral Ballad*, his *Lines on Jemmy Dawson*, and his *School-mistress*, which last is a perfect piece of writing.

Akenside had in him the materials of poetry, but he was hardly a great poet. He improved his *Pleasures of the Imagination* in the subsequent editions, by pruning away a great many redundances of style and ornament. Armstrong is better, though he has not chosen a very exhilarating subject — *The Art of Preserving Health*. Churchill’s *Satires on the Scotch*, and *Characters of the Players*, are as good as the subject deserved: they are strong, coarse, and full of an air of hardened assurance. I ought not to pass over without mention Green’s *Poem on the Spleen*, or Dyer’s *Grongar Hill*.

The principal name of the period we are now come to is that of Goldsmith, than which few names stand higher or fairer in the annals of modern literature. One should have his own pen to describe him as he ought to be described, amiable, various, and bland, with careless inimitable grace touching on every kind of excellence, with manners unstudied, but a gentle heart, performing miracles of skill from pure happiness of nature, and whose greatest fault was ignorance of his own worth. As a poet,

he is the most flowing and elegant of our versifiers since Pope, with traits of artless nature which Pope had not, and with a peculiar felicity in his turns upon words, which he constantly repeated with delightful effect, such as:

His lot, though small,
He sees that little lot, the lot of all.

* * *

And turn'd and look'd, and turn'd to look again.

As a novelist, his *Vicar of Wakefield* has charmed all Europe. What reader is there in the civilised world who is not the better for the story of the watches which the worthy Dr Primrose demolished so deliberately with the poker—for the knowledge of the guinea which the Miss Primroses kept unchanged in their pockets—the adventure of the picture of the Vicar's family, which could not be got into the house, and that of the Flamborough family, all painted with oranges in their hands, or for the story of the case of shagreen spectacles and the cosmogony?

As a comic writer, his Tony Lumpkin draws forth new powers from Mr Liston's face. That alone is praise enough for it. Poor Goldsmith! how happy he has made others! how unhappy he was in himself! He never had the pleasure of reading his own works! He had only the satisfaction of good-naturedly relieving the necessities of others, and the consolation of being harassed to death with his own! He is the most amusing and interesting person, in one of the most amusing and interesting books in the world, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*. His peach-

coloured coat shall always bloom in Boswell's writings, and his fame survive in his own! His genius was a mixture of originality and imitation: he could do nothing without some model before him, and he could copy nothing that he did not adorn with the graces of his own mind.—Almost all the latter part of the *Vicar of Wakefield*, and a great deal of the former, is taken from *Joseph Andrews*; but the circumstances I have mentioned above are not.

The finest things he has left behind him in verse are his character of a country school-master, and that prophetic description of Burke in the *Retaliation*. His moral Essays, in *The Citizen of the World*, are as agreeable chit-chat as can be conveyed in the form of didactic discourses.

Warton was a poet and a scholar, studious with ease, learned without affectation. He had a happiness which some have been prouder of than he, who deserved it less—he was poet-laureate.

And that green wreath which decks the bard when dead,
That laurel garland, crown'd his living head.

But he bore his honours meekly, and performed his half-yearly task regularly. I should not have mentioned him for this distinction alone (the highest which a poet can receive from the State), but for another circumstance; I mean his being the author of some of the finest sonnets in the language—at least so they appear to me; and as this species of composition has the necessary advantage of being short (though it is also sometimes both 'tedious and brief'), I will here

repeat two or three of them, as treating pleasing subjects in a pleasing and philosophical way:

Written in a blank leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon

Deem not, devoid of elegance, the sage,
By Fancy's genuine feelings unbeguil'd
Of painful pedantry the poring child;
Who turns of these proud tomes the historic page,
Now sunk by Time, and Henry's fiercer rage.
Think'st thou the warbling Muses never smil'd
On his lone hours? Ingenuous views engage
His thoughts, on themes unclassic falsely styl'd,
Intent. While cloister'd piety displays
Her mouldering roll, the piercing eye explores
New manners, and the pomp of elder days,
Whence culls the pensive bard his pictur'd stores.
Not rough nor barren are the winding ways
Of hoar Antiquity, but strewn with flowers.

Sonnet. Written at Stonehenge.

Thou noblest monument of Albion's isle,
Whether, by Merlin's aid, from Scythia's shore
To Amber's fatal plain Pendragon bore,
Huge frame of giant hands, the mighty pile,
T' entomb his Britons slain by Hengist's guile:
Or Druid priests, sprinkled with human gore,
Taught 'mid thy massy maze their mystic lore:
Or Danish chiefs, enrich'd with savage spoil,
To victory's idol vast, an unhewn shrine,
Rear'd the rude heap, or in thy hallow'd ground
Repose the kings of Brutus' genuine line;
Or here those kings in solemn state were crown'd;
Studious to trace thy wondrous origin,
We muse on many an ancient tale renown'd.

Nothing can be more admirable than the learning here displayed, or the inference from it, that it is of no use but as it leads to interesting thought and reflection.

That written after seeing Wilton House is in the same style, but I prefer concluding

with that to the river Lodon, which has a personal, as well as poetical, interest about it:

Ah! what a weary race my feet have run,
 Since first I trod thy banks with alders crown'd,
 And thought my way was all through fairy ground,
 Beneath the azure sky and golden sun:
 When first my Muse to lisp her notes begun!
 While pensive memory traces back the round
 Which fills the varied interval between;
 Much pleasure, more of sorrow, marks the scene.
 Sweet native stream! those skies and suns so pure
 No more return, to cheer my evening road!
 Yet still one joy remains, that not obscure
 Nor useless all my vacant days have flow'd
 From youth's gay dawn to manhood's prime mature,
 Nor with the Muse's laurel unbestow'd.

I have thus gone through all the names of this period I could think of, but I find that there are others still waiting behind that I had never thought of. Here is a list of some of them—Pattison, Tickell, Hill, Somerville, Browne, Pitt, Wilkie, Dodsley, Shaw, Smart, Langhorne, Bruce, Greame, Glover, Lovibond, Penrose, Mickle, Jago, Scott, Whitehead, Jenyns, Logan, Cotton, Cunningham, and Blacklock. I think it will be best to let them pass, and say nothing about them. It will be hard to persuade so many respectable persons that they are dull writers, and if we give them any praise, they will send others.

But here comes one whose claims cannot be so easily set aside: they have been sanctioned by learning, hailed by genius, and hallowed by misfortune—I mean Chatterton. Yet I must say what I think of him, and that is not what is generally thought. I pass over the disputes

between the learned antiquaries, Dr Mills, Herbert Croft, and Dr Knox, whether he was to be placed after Shakespeare and Dryden, or to come after Shakespeare alone. A living poet has borne a better testimony to him

I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous boy,
The sleepless soul that perished in his pride;
And him* who walked in glory and in joy
Beside his plough along the mountain side.

I am loth to put asunder whom so great an authority has joined together; but I cannot find in Chatterton's works any thing so extraordinary as the age at which they were written. They have a facility, vigour, and knowledge, which were prodigious in a boy of sixteen, but which would not have been so in a man of twenty. He did not shew extraordinary powers of genius, but extraordinary precocity. Nor do I believe he would have written better had he lived. He knew this himself, or he would have lived. Great geniuses, like great kings, have too much to think of to kill themselves; for their mind to them also 'a kingdom is'. With an unaccountable power coming over him at an unusual age, and with the youthful confidence it inspired, he performed wonders, and was willing to set a seal on his reputation by a tragic catastrophe. He had done his best; and, like another Empedocles, threw himself into *Ætna*, to ensure immortality. The brazen slippers alone remain!

* Burns. These lines are taken from the introduction to Mr Wordsworth's poem of the *Leech-gatherer*.

LECTURE VII

ON BURNS, AND THE OLD ENGLISH BALLADS

I AM sorry that what I said in the conclusion of the last Lecture, respecting Chatterton, should have given dissatisfaction to some persons, with whom I would willingly agree on all such matters. What I meant was less to call in question Chatterton's genius than to object to the common mode of estimating its magnitude by its prematurity. The lists of fame are not filled with the dates of births or deaths; and the side-mark of the age at which they were done wears out in works destined for immortality. Had Chatterton really done more, we should have thought less of him, for our attention would then have been fixed on the excellence of the works themselves, instead of the singularity of the circumstances in which they are produced. But because he attained to the full powers of manhood at an early age, I do not see that he would have attained to more than those powers, had he lived to be a man. He was a prodigy, because in him the ordinary march of nature was violently precipitated; and it is therefore inferred that he would have continued to hold on his course, 'unslacked of motion'. On the contrary, who knows but he might have

lived to be poet-laureate? It is much better to let him remain as he was. Of his actual productions, any one may think as highly as he pleases; I would only guard against adding to the account of his *quantum meruit* those possible productions by which the learned rhapsodists of his time raised his gigantic pretensions to an equality with those of Homer and Shakespeare. It is amusing to read some of these exaggerated descriptions, each rising above the other in extravagance. In Anderson's *Life*, we find that Mr Warton speaks of him 'as a prodigy of genius', as a 'singular instance of prematurity of abilities': that may be true enough, and Warton was at any rate a competent judge; but Mr Malone 'believes him to have been the greatest genius that England has produced since the days of Shakespeare'. Dr Gregory says, 'he must rank, as a universal genius, above Dryden, and, perhaps, only second to Shakespeare'. Mr Herbert Croft is still more unqualified in his praises; he asserts, that 'no such being, at any period of life, has ever been known, or possibly ever will be known'. He runs a parallel between Chatterton and Milton; and asserts, that 'an army of Macedonian and Swedish mad butchers fly before him', meaning, I suppose, that Alexander the Great and Charles the twelfth were nothing to him; 'nor', he adds, 'does my memory supply me with any human being, who, at such an age, with such advantages, has produced such compositions. Under the heathen, mythology, superstition and admiration would have explained all, by bringing Apollo on earth; nor would the God ever have descended with

more credit to himself'.—Chatterton's physiognomy would at least have enabled him to pass *incognito*. It is quite different from the look of timid wonder and delight with which Annibal Caracci has painted a young Apollo listening to the first sounds he draws from a Pan's pipe, under the tutelage of the old Silenus ! If Mr Croft is sublime on the occasion, Dr Knox is no less pathetic. 'The testimony of Dr Knox', says Dr Anderson, (*Essays*, p. 144.) 'does equal credit to the classical taste and amiable benevolence of the writer, and the genius and reputation of Chatterton'. 'When I read', says the Doctor, 'the researches of those learned antiquaries who have endeavoured to prove that the poems attributed to Rowley were really written by him, I observe many ingenious remarks in confirmation of their opinion, which it would be tedious, if not difficult, to controvert.'

Now this is so far from the mark, that the whole controversy might have been settled by any one but the learned antiquaries themselves, who had the smallest share of their learning, from this single circumstance, that the poems read as smooth as any modern poems, if you read them as modern compositions; and that you cannot read them, or make verse of them at all, if you pronounce or accent the words as they were spoken at the time when the poems were pretended to have been written. The whole secret of the imposture, which nothing but a deal of learned dust, raised by collecting and removing a great deal of learned rubbish, could have prevented our laborious critics from seeing through, lies on the face

of it (to say nothing of the burlesque air which is scarcely disguised throughout) in the repetition of a few obsolete words, and in the misspelling of common ones.

‘No sooner’, proceeds the Doctor, ‘do I turn to the poems, than the labour of the antiquaries appears only waste of time; and I am involuntarily forced to join in placing that laurel, which he seems so well to have deserved, on the brow of Chatterton. The poems bear so many marks of superior genius that they have deservedly excited the general attention of polite scholars, and are considered as the most remarkable productions in modern poetry. We have many instances of poetical eminence at an early age; but neither Cowley, Milton, nor Pope, ever produced anything while they were boys, which can justly be compared to the poems of Chatterton. The learned antiquaries do not indeed dispute their excellence. They extol it in the highest terms of applause. They raise their favourite Rowley to a rivalry with Homer: but they make the very merits of the works an argument against their real author. “Is it possible”, say they, “that a boy should produce compositions so beautiful and masterly?” That a common boy should produce them is not possible’, rejoins the Doctor; ‘but that they should be produced by a boy of an extraordinary genius, such as was that of Homer or Shakespeare, though a prodigy, is such a one as by no means exceeds the bounds of rational credibility.’

Now it does not appear that Shakespeare or Homer were such early prodigies; so that by

this reasoning he must take precedence of them too, as well as of Milton, Cowley, and Pope. The reverend and classical writer then breaks out into the following melancholy raptures:

‘Unfortunate boy! short and evil were thy days, but thy fame shall be immortal. Hadst thou been known to the munificent patrons of genius.....

‘Unfortunate boy! poorly wast thou accommodated during thy short sojourning here among us; rudely wast thou treated, sorely did thy feelings suffer from the scorn of the unworthy; and there are at last those who wish to rob thee of thy only meed, thy posthumous glory. Severe too are the censures of thy morals. In the gloomy moments of despondency, I fear thou hast uttered impious and blasphemous thoughts. But let thy more rigid censors reflect that thou wast literally and strictly but a boy. Let many of thy bitterest enemies reflect what were their own religious principles, and whether they had any, at the age of fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen. Surely it is a severe, and an unjust, surmise that thou wouldst probably have ended thy life as a victim to the laws, if thou hadst not ended it as thou didst.’

Enough, enough, of the learned antiquaries, and of the classical and benevolent testimony of Dr Knox. Chatterton was, indeed, badly enough off; but he was at least saved from the pain and shame of reading this woful lamentation over fallen genius, which circulates, splendidly bound, in the fourteenth edition, while he is a prey to worms. As to those who are really capable of admiring Chatterton’s genius, or of

feeling an interest in his fate, I would only say that I never heard any one speak of any one of his works as if it were an old well-known favourite, and had become a faith and a religion in his mind. It is his name, his youth, and what he might have lived to have done, that excite our wonder and admiration. He has the same sort of posthumous fame that an actor of the last age has—an abstracted reputation which is independent of anything we know of his works. The admirers of Collins never think of him without recalling to their minds his *Ode on the Evening*, or on the *Poetical Character*. Gray's *Elegy*, and his popularity, are identified together, and inseparable even in imagination. It is the same with respect to Burns. When you speak of him as a poet, you mean his works, his *Tam o' Shanter*, or his *Cotter's Saturday Night*. But the enthusiasts for Chatterton, if you ask for the proof of his extraordinary genius, are obliged to turn to the volume, and perhaps find there what they seek; but it is not in their minds; and it is of *that* I spoke.

The Minstrel's song in *Ælla* is, I think, the best.

O! synge untoe my roundelaie,
 O! droppe the brynie teare wythe mee,
 Daunce ne moe atte halue daie,
 Lycke a rennynge ryver bee.
 Mie love ys dedde,
 Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
 Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Black hys cryne as the wyntere nyght,
 Whyte hys rode as the sommer snowe,
 Rodde hys face as the mornynge lyghte,
 Cale he lyes ynne the grave belowe.

Mie love ys dedde,
 Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
 Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Swote hys tongue as the throstles note,
 Quycke ynne daunce as thought cann bee,
 Defte his taboure, codgelle stote,
 O! hee lys bie the wyllowe-tree.

My love ys dedde,
 Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
 Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Harke! the ravenne flappes hys wynges,
 In the briared dell belowe;
 Harke! the dethe-owle loude dothe synge,
 To the nyghte-mares as theie goe.

Mie love ys dedde,
 Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
 All under the wyllowe-tree.

See! the whyte moone sheenes onne hie;
 Whyterre ys mie true loves shroude;
 Whyterre yanne the mornynge skie,
 Whyterre yanne the evenynge cloude.

My love ys dedde,
 Gone to hys deathe-bedde,
 Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Heere, upon mie true loves grave,
 Schalle the baren fleurs be layde,
 Ne one hallie seyncte to save
 Al the celness of a mayde.

Mie love ys dedde,
 Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
 Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Wythe mie hondes I'll dent the brieres
 Rounde hys hallie corse to gre,
 Ouphante fairies, lyghte your fyres,
 Heere mie boddie stille schalle bee.

Mie love ys dedde,
 Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
 Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Comme, wythe acorne-coppe and thorne,
 Drayne my hartys blodde awaie;
 Lyfe and all yttes goode I scorne,
 Daunce bie nete, or feaste by daie
 Mie love ys dedde,
 Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
 Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Water wythes, crownede wythe reytes,
 Bere mee to yer leathalle tyde.
 I die; I comme; mie true love waytes.
 Thos the damselle spake, and dyed.

To proceed to the more immediate subject of the present Lecture, the character and writings of Burns. Shakespeare says of some one, that 'he was like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring'. Burns, the poet was not such a man. He had a strong mind, and a strong body, the fellow to it. He had a real heart of flesh and blood beating in his bosom—you can almost hear it throb. Someone said, that if you had shaken hands with him, his hand would have burnt yours. The gods, indeed, 'made him poetical'; but nature had a hand in him first. His heart was in the right place. He did not 'create a soul under the ribs of death', by tinkling siren sounds, or by piling up centos of poetic diction; but, for the artificial flowers of poetry, he plucked the mountain-daisy under his feet; and a field-mouse, hurrying from its ruined dwelling, could inspire him with the sentiments of terror and pity. He held the plough or the pen with the same firm, manly grasp; nor did he cut out poetry as we cut out watch-papers, with finical dexterity, nor from the same flimsy materials. Burns was not like Shakespeare in the range of his genius; but

there is something of the same magnanimity, directness, and unaffected character about him. He was not a sickly sentimentalist, a namby-pamby poet, and mincing metre ballad-monger, any more than Shakespeare. He would as soon hear 'a brazen candlestick tuned, or a dry wheel grate on the axletree'. He was as much of a man—not a twentieth part as much of a poet—as Shakespeare. With but little of his imagination or inventive power, he had the same life of mind: within the narrow circle of personal feeling or domestic incidents, the pulse of his poetry flows as healthily and vigorously. He had an eye to see; a heart to feel—no more. His pictures of good fellowship, of social glee, of quaint humour, are equal to anything; they come up to nature, and they cannot go beyond. The sly jest collected in his laughing eye at the sight of the grotesque and ludicrous in manners—the large tear rolled down his manly cheek at the sight of another's distress. He has made us as well acquainted with himself as it is possible to be; has let out the honest impulses of his native disposition, the unequal conflict of the passions in his breast, with the same frankness and truth of description. His strength is not greater than his weakness: his virtues were greater than his vices. His virtues belonged to his genius: his vices to his situation, which did not correspond to his genius.

It has been usual to attack Burns's moral character, and the moral tendency of his writings, at the same time; and Mr Wordsworth, in a letter to Mr Gray, Master of the High School at Edinburgh, in attempting to defend, has only

laid him open to a more serious and unheard-of responsibility. Mr Gray might very well have sent him back, in return for his epistle, the answer of Holofernes in *Love's Labour Lost*: 'Via, goodman Dull, thou hast spoken no word all this while'. The author of this performance, which is as weak in effect as it is pompous in pretension, shows a great dislike of Robespierre, Buonaparte, and of Mr Jeffrey, whom he, by some unaccountable fatality, classes together as the three most formidable enemies of the human race that have appeared in his (Mr Wordsworth's) remembrance; but he betrays very little liking to Burns. He is, indeed, anxious to get him out of the unhallowed clutches of the Edinburgh Reviewers (as a mere matter of poetical privilege), only to bring him before a graver and higher tribunal, which is his own; and, after repeating and insinuating ponderous charges against him, shakes his head, and declines giving any opinion in so tremendous a case; so that, though the judgment of the former critic is set aside, poor Burns remains just where he was, and nobody gains anything by the cause but Mr Wordsworth, in an increasing opinion of his own wisdom and purity. 'Out upon this half-faced fellowship!' The author of the *Lyrical Ballads* has thus missed a fine opportunity of doing Burns justice, and himself honour. He might have shown himself a philosophical prose-writer, as well as a philosophical poet. He might have offered as amiable and as gallant a defence of the Muses as my uncle Toby, in the honest simplicity of his heart, did of the army. He might have said at once, instead of making a

parcel of wry faces over the matter, that Burns had written *Tam o' Shanter*, and that that alone was enough; that he could hardly have described the excesses of mad, hairbrained, roaring mirth, and convivial indulgence, which are the soul of it, if he himself had not 'drunk full o'ther of the tun than of the well'—unelss 'the act and practique part of life had been the mistress of his theourique'. Mr Wordsworth might have quoted such lines as:

The landlady and Tam grew gracious,
Wi' favours, secret, sweet, and precious;

or,

Care, mad to see a man so happy,
E'en drowned himself amang the nappy;

and fairly confessed that he could not have written such lines from a want of proper habits and previous sympathy; and that, till some great puritanical genius should arise to do these things equally well without any knowledge of them, the world might forgive Burns the injuries he had done his health and fortune in his poetical apprenticeship to experience, for the pleasure he had afforded them. Instead of this, Mr Wordsworth hints, that, with different personal habits and greater strength of mind, Burns would have written differently, and almost as well as *he* does. He might have taken that line of Gay's,

The fly that sips treacle is lost in the sweets,

and applied it in all its force and pathos to the poetical character. He might have argued, that poets are men of genius, and that a man of

genius is not a machine; but they live in a state of intellectual intoxication, and that it is too much to expect them to be distinguished by peculiar *sangfroid*, circumspection, and sobriety. Poets are by nature men of stronger imagination and keener sensibilities than others; and it is a contradiction to suppose them at the same time governed only by the cool, dry, calculating dictates of reason and foresight. Mr Wordsworth might have ascertained the boundaries that part the provinces of reason and imagination: that it is the business of the understanding to exhibit things in their relative proportions and ultimate consequences—of the imagination to insist on their immediate impressions, and to indulge their strongest impulses; but it is the poet's office to pamper the imagination of his readers and his own with the extremes of present ecstasy or agony, to snatch the swift-winged golden minutes, the torturing hour, and to banish the dull, prosaic, monotonous realities of life, both from his thoughts and from his practice. Mr Wordsworth might have shown how it is, that all men of genius, or of originality and independence of mind, are liable to practical errors, from the very confidence their superiority inspires, which makes them fly in the face of custom and prejudice, always rashly, sometimes unjustly; for, after all, custom and prejudice are not without foundation in truth and reason, and no one individual is a match for the world in power, very few in knowledge. The world may altogether be set down as older and wiser than any single person in it.

Again, our philosophical letter-writer might

have enlarged on the temptations to which Burns was exposed, from his struggles with fortune, and the uncertainty of his fate. He might have shown how a poet, not born to wealth or title, was kept in a constant state of feverish anxiety with respect to his fame and the means of a precarious livelihood: that, 'from being chilled with poverty, steeped in contempt, he had passed into the sunshine of fortune, and was lifted to the very pinnacle of public favour'; yet, even there, could not count on the continuance of success, but was, 'like the giddy sailor on the mast, ready with every blast to topple down into the fatal bowels of the deep!' He might have traced his habit of ale-house tippling to the last long precious draught of his favourite usquebaugh, which he took in the prospect of bidding farewell for ever to his native land; and his conjugal infidelities to his first disappointment in love, which would not have happened to him, if he had been born to a small estate in land, or bred up behind a counter!

Lastly, Mr Wordsworth might have shown the incompatibility between the Muses and the Excise, which never agreed well together, or met in one seat, till they were unaccountably reconciled on Rydal Mount. He must know (no man better) the distraction created by the opposite calls of business and of fancy, the torment of extents, the plague of receipts laid in order or mislaid, the disagreeableness of exacting penalties, or paying the forfeiture; and how all this (together with the broaching of casks, and the splashing of beer-barrels) must

have preyed upon a mind like Burns', with more than his natural sensibility and none of his acquired firmness.

Mr Coleridge, alluding to this circumstance of the promotion of the Scottish Bard to be 'a ganger of ale-firkins', in a poetical epistle to his friend Charles Lamb, calls upon him, in a burst of heart-felt indignation, to gather a wreath of henbane, nettles, and nightshade:

To twine
The illustrious brow of Scotch nobility.

If, indeed, Mr Lamb had undertaken to write a letter in defence of Burns, how different would it have been from this of Mr Wordsworth's! How much better than I can even imagine it to have been done!

It is hardly reasonable to look for a hearty or genuine defence of Burns from the pen of Mr Wordsworth; for there is no common link of sympathy between them. Nothing can be more different or hostile than the spirit of their poetry. Mr Wordsworth's poetry is the poetry of mere sentiment and pensive contemplation: Burns's is a very highly sublimated essence of animal existence. With Burns, 'self-love and social are the same':

And we'll tak a cup of kindness yet,
For auld lang syne.

Mr Wordsworth is 'himself alone', a recluse philosopher, or a reluctant spectator of the scenes of many-coloured life; moralising on them, not describing, not entering into them. Robert Burns has exerted all the vigour of his mind,

all the happiness of his nature, in exalting the pleasures of wine, of love, and good fellowship: but in Mr Wordsworth there is a total disunion and divorce of the faculties of the mind from those of the body: the banns are forbid, or a separation is austere pronounced from bed and board—*a mensa et thoro*. From the *Lyrical Ballads*, it does not appear that men eat or drink, marry, or are given in marriage. If we lived by every sentiment that proceeded out of mouths, and not by bread or wine, or if the species were continued like trees (to borrow an expression from the great Sir Thomas Browne), Mr Wordsworth's poetry would be just as good as ever. It is not so with Burns: he is 'famous for the keeping it up', and in his verse is ever fresh and gay. For this, it seems, he has fallen under the displeasure of the Edinburgh Reviewers, and the still more formidable patronage of Mr Wordsworth's pen.

This, this was the unkindest cut of all.

I was going to give some extracts out of this composition in support of what I have said, but I find them too tedious. Indeed (if I may be allowed to speak my whole mind, under correction) Mr Wordsworth could not be in any way expected to tolerate, or give a favourable interpretation to, Burn's constitutional foibles—even his best virtues are not good enough for him. He is repelled and driven back into himself, not less by the worth than by the faults of others. His taste is as exclusive and repugnant as his genius. It is because so few things give him pleasure, that he gives pleasure to so few

people. It is not every one who can perceive the sublimity of a daisy, or the pathos to be extracted from a withered thorn!

To proceed from Burn's patrons to his poetry, than which no two things can be more different. His *Twa Dogs* is a very spirited piece of description, both as it respects the animal and human creation, and conveys a very vivid idea of the manners both of high and low life. The burlesque panegyric of the first dog:

His locked, lettered, braw brass collar
Show'd him the gentleman and scholar,

reminds one of Launce's account of his dog Crabbe, where he is said, as an instance of his being in the way of promotion, 'to have got among three or four gentleman-like dogs under the Duke's table'. The *Halloween* is the most striking and picturesque description of local customs and scenery. The *Brigs of Ayr*, the *Address to a Haggis*, *Scotch Drink*, and innumerable others, are, however, full of the same kind of characteristic and comic painting. But his masterpiece in this way is his *Tam o' Shanter*. I shall give the beginning of it, but I am afraid I shall hardly know when to leave off:

When chapman billies leave the street,
And drouthy neebours neebours meet,
As market-days are wearing late,
And folk begin to tak' the gate;
While we sit bousing at the nappy,
And getting fou and unco happy,
We think na on the lang Scots miles,
The mosses, waters, slaps, and styles,
That lie between us and our hame,
Where sits our sulky, sullen dame,

Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.

This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,
As he frae Ayr ae night did canter;
(Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses
For honest men and bonny lasses).

O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise,
As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice!
She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,
A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
That frae November till October
Ae market-day thou was na sober;
That ilka melder, wi' the miller,
Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;
That ev'ry naig was ca'd a shoe on,
The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;
That at the Lord's house, ev'n on Sunday,
Thou drank wi' Kirton Jean till Monday—
She prophesy'd, that, late or soon,
Thou wad be found deep drown'd in Doon;
Or catch't wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.

Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
To think how mony counsels sweet,
How mony lengthen'd, sage advices,
The husband frae the wife despises!

But to our tale: Ae market night,
Tam had got planted unco right
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely,
And at his elbow, Souther Johnny,
His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony;
Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither;
They had been fou for weeks thegither.
The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter,
And aye the ale was growing better:
The landlady and Tam grew gracious
Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious:
The Souther tauld his queerest stories;
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus:
The storm without might rair and rustle,
Tam did na mind the storm a whistle.

Care, mad to see a man sae nappy,
E'en drown'd himsel amang the nappy;
As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,

The minutes wing'd their way wi' pleasure:
Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
O'er a' the ills of life victorious!

But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flow'r—its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow, falls in the river,
A moment white—then melts for ever;
Or like the Borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form,
Evanishing amid the storm.—
Nae man can tether time or tide,
The hour approaches, Tam maun ride;
That hour o' night's black arch the key-stane,
That dreary hour he mounts his beast in,
And sic a night he taks the road in,
As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last;
The rattling showers rose on the blast,
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd,
Loud, deep, and lang, the thunder bellow'd:
That night a child might understand
The Deil had business on his hand.

Weel mounted on his grey mare, Meg,
A better never fited leg,
Tam skelpit on thro' dub and mire,
Despising wind, and rain, and fire;
Whiles haudding fast his gude blue bonnet;
Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet;
Whiles glowing round wi' prudent cares,
Lest bogles catch him unawares;
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
Where ghaists and houlets nightly cry.—

By this time Tam was cross the ford,
Where in the snaw, the chapman smoor'd;
And past the birks and meikle stane,
Where drunken Charlie brak's neck-bane;
And thro' the whins, and by the cairn,
Where hunters fand the murder'd bairn;
And near the thorn, aboon the well,
Where Mungo's mither hang'd hersel.—
Before him Doon pours all his floods;
The doubling storm roars thro' the woods;
The lightnings flash from pole to pole;
Near and more near the thunders roll:

Whan, glimmering thro' the groaning trees,
 Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze;
 Thro' ilka bore the beams were glancing;
 And loud resounded mirth and dancing.

Inspiring bold John Barleycorn!
 What dangers thou canst make us scorn!
 Wi' Tippenny, we fear nae evil,
 Wi' Usqueba, we'll face the devil!
 The swats sae ream'd in Tammie's noddle,
 Fair play, he car'd na de'ils a boddle.
 But Maggie stood right sair astonish'd,
 Till, by the heel and hand admonish'd,
 She ventur'd forward on the light,
 And, wow! Tam saw an unco sight!
 Warlocks and witches in a dance,
 Nae light cotillion new frae France,
 But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
 Put life and mettle in their heels.
 As winnock-bunker, in the east,
 There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast;
 A touzie tyke, black, grim, and large,
 To gie them music was his charge;
 He screw'd the pipes, and gart them skirl,
 Till roof and ratters a' did dirl.—
 Coffins stood round like open presses,
 That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;
 And, by some devilish cantrip slight,
 Each in its cauld hand held a light—
 By which heroic Tam was able
 To note upon the haly table
 A murderer's banes in gibbet-airns;
 Twa span-lang, wee, unchristen'd bairns;
 A thief, new cutted frae a rape,
 Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape;
 Five tomahawks, wi' bluid red rusted;
 Five scimitars, wi' murder crusted;
 A garter, which a babe had strangled;
 A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
 Whom his ain son o' life bereft,
 The grey hairs yet stack to the heft;
 Wi' mair o' horrible and awfu',
 Which e'en to name wad be unlawfu'.

As Tammie glowr'd, amaz'd and curious,
 The mirth and fun grew fast and furious:
 The Piper loud and louder blew;

The dancers quick and quicker flew;
 They reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,
 Till ilka Carlin swat and reekit,
 And coost her duddies to the wark,
 And linket at it in her sark!

Now Tam, O Tam! had they been queans
 A' plump and strapping in their teens;
 Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen,
 Been snaw-white seventeen hundred linen!
 Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
 That ance were plush, o' gude blue hair,
 I wad hae gi'en them aff my hurdies,
 For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies!

But wither'd beldams, auld and droll,
 Rigwoodie hags wad spean a foal,
 Louping and flinging on a crummock,
 I wonder did na turn thy stomach.

But Tam ken'd what was what fu' brawly,
 There was ae winsome wench and waly,
 That night enlisted in the core,
 (Lang after ken'd on Carrick shore;
 For mony a beast to dead she shot,
 And perish'd mony a bonnie boat,
 And shook baith meikle corn and bear,
 And kept the country-side in fear)
 Her cutty sark o' Paisely harn,
 That while a lassie she had worn,
 In longitude tho' sorely scanty,
 It was her best, and she was vaunt.—
 Ah! little ken'd thy revered grannie,
 That sark she coft for her wee Nannie,
 Wi' twa pund Scots ('twas a' her riches),
 Wad ever grac'd a dance of witches!

But here my Muse her wing maun cour;
 Sic flights are far beyond her power:
 To sing how Nannie lap and flang,
 (A souple jade she was, and strang)
 And how Tam stood like ane bewitch'd,
 And thought his very een enrich'd;
 Ev'n Satan glowr'd and fidg'd fu' fain,
 And hotch't and blew wi' might and main;
 Till first ae caper, syne anither,
 Tam tint his reason a' thegither,
 And roars out, 'Weel done, Cutty Sark!'
 And in an instant all was dark;

And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,
When out the hellish legion sallied.

As bees biz out wi' angry fyke
When plundering herds assail their byke;
As open pussie's mortal foes,
When, pop! she starts before their nose;
As eager rins the market-crowd,
When 'Catch the thief!' resounds aloud;
So Maggie rins—the witches follow,
Wi' mony an eldritch skreech and hollow,

Ah, Tam! ah, Tam! thou'll get thy fairin'!
In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin'!
In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin'!
Kate soon will be a waefu' woman!
Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
And win the key-stane o' the brig;
There, at them thou thy tail may toss;
A running stream they dare na cross;
But ere the key-stane she could make,
The fient a tail she had to shake!
For Nannie, far before the rest,
Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle:
But little wist she Maggie's mettle—
Ae spring brought aff her master hale,
But left behind her ain grey tail:
The Carlin claught her by the rump,
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump,
Now, wha this tale of truth shall read,
Ilk man and mother's son tak heed:
Whane'er to drink you are inclin'd,
Or Cutty Sarks rin in your mind,
Think, ye may buy the joys owre dear;
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare.

Burns has given the extremes of licentious eccentricity and convivial enjoyment, in the story of this scape-grace, and of patriarchal simplicity and gravity in describing the old national character of the Scottish peasantry. *The Cotter's Saturday Night* is a noble and pathetic picture of human manners, mingled with a fine religious awe. It comes over the

mind like a slow and solemn strain of music. The soul of the poet aspires from this scene of low-thoughted care, and reposes, in trembling hope, on 'the bosom of its Father and its God'. Hardly any thing can be more touching than the following stanzas, for instance, whether as they describe human interests, or breathe a lofty devotional spirit:

The toil-worn Cotter frae his labour goes,
 This night his weekly moil is at an end.
 Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
 Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
 And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.

At length his lonely cot appears in view,
 Beneath the shelter of an aged tree;
 Th' expectant wee-things, toddlin, stacher through
 To meet their dad, wi' flichterin noise and glee.
 His wee-bit ingle, blinkin bonilie,
 His clean hearth-stane, his thriftie wife's smile,
 The lisping infant, prattling on his knee,
 Does a' his weary carking cares beguile,
 And makes him quite forget his labour and his toil.

Belyve, the elder bairns come drapping in
 At service out, amang the farmers roun',
 Some ca' the pleugh, some herd, some tentie rin
 A cannie errand to a neebor town;
 Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman-grown,
 In youthfu' bloom, love sparkling in her e'e,
 Comes hame, perhaps, to show a braw new gown,
 Or deposite her sair-won penny-fee,
 To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be.

Wi' joy unfeign'd, brothers and sisters meet,
 And each for others welfare kindly spiers;
 The social hours, swift-wing'd, unnotic'd fleet;
 Each tells the uncoss that he sees or hears:
 The parents, partial, eye their hopeful years;
 Anticipation forward points the view;
 The mither, wi' her needle and her shears,
 Gars auld claes look amaist as weel's the new;
 The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.

But, hark! a rap comes gently to the door;
 Jenny, wha kens the menning o' the same,
 Tells how a neebor lad cam o'er the moor,
 To do some errands, and convoy her hame.
 The wily mother sees the conscious flame.
 Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her cheek;
 With heart-struck, anxious care, inquires his name,
 While Jenny hafflins is afraid to speak;
 Weel pleas'd the mother hears it's nae wild, worthless rake.

Wi' kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben;
 A strappan youth; he tak's the mother's eye;
 Blithe Jenny sees the visit's no ill ta'en;
 The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and kye.
 The youngster's artless heart o'erflows wi' joy
 But blate an' laithfu', scarce can weel behave;
 The mother, wi' a woman's wiles, can spy
 What makes the youth sea bashfu' an' sae grave;
 Weel-pleas'd to think her bairn's respected like the lave.

But now the supper crowns their simple board,
 The halesome parritch, chief o' Scotia's food:
 The soupe their only hawkie does afford,
 That 'yont the hallan snugly chows her cood:
 The dame brings forth, in complimental mood,
 To grace the lad, her weel-hained kebbuck, fell.
 An' aft he's prest, an' aft he ca's it guid;
 The frugal wifie, garrulous, will tell,
 How 'twas a towmond auld, sin' lint was i' the bell.

The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
 They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;
 The sire turns o'er, with patriarchal gracc,
 The big ha'-Bible, ance his father's pride:
 His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
 His lyart haffets wearing thin an' bare;
 Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
 He wales a portion wi' judicious care;
 And 'Let us worship God!' he says, with solemn air.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise;
 They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim;
 Perhaps Dundee's wild-warbling measure rise,
 Or plaintive Martyrs, worthy of the name;
 Or noble Elgin beats the heav'nard flame,

The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays:
 Compar'd with these, Italian trills are tame;
 The tickled ears no heart-felt raptures raise;
 Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise.

Burns's poetical epistles to his friends are admirable, whether for the touches of satire, the painting of character, or the sincerity of friendship they display. Those to captain Grose, and to Davie, a brother poet, are among the best: they are 'the true pathos and sublime of human life'. His prose-letters are sometimes tinged with affectation. They seem written by a man who has been admired for his wit, and is expected on all occasions to shine. Those in which he expresses his ideas of natural beauty in reference to Allison's *Essay on Taste*, and advocates the keeping up the remembrances of old customs and seasons, are the most powerfully written. His English serious odes and moral stanzas are, in general, failures, such as *The Lament, Man was made to Mourn*, etc.; nor do I much admire his *Scots wha hae ri' Wallace bled*. In this strain of didactic or sentimental moralising, the lines to Glencairn are the most happy and impressive. His imitations of the old humorous ballad style of Ferguson's songs are no whit inferior to the admirable originals, such as *John Anderson my Joe*, and many more. But of all his productions, the pathetic and serious love-songs which he has left behind him, in the manner of the old ballads, are perhaps those which take the deepest and most lasting hold of the mind. Such are the lines to Mary Morison, and those entitled *Jessy*.

Here's a health to ane I lo'e dear—

Here's a health to ane I lo'e dear—

Thou art sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet,
And soft as their parting tear—Jessy !

Altho' thou maun never be mine,

Altho' even hope is denied;

'Tis sweeter for thee despairing

Than aught in the world beside—Jessy

The conclusion of the other is as follows :

Yestreen, when to the trembling string

The dance gaed through the lighted ha',

To thee my fancy took its wing,

I sat, but neither heard nor saw.

Tho' this was fair, and that was braw,

And yon the toast of a' the town,

I sighed, and said among them a',

Ye are na Mary Morison.

That beginning, 'Oh gin my love were a bonny red rose', is a piece of rich and fantastic description. One would think that nothing could surpass these in beauty of expression, and in true pathos: and nothing does or can, but some of the old Scotch ballads themselves. There is in them a still more original cast of thought, a more romantic imagery—the thistle's glittering down, the gilliflower on the old garden-wall, the horseman's silver bells, the hawk on its perch—a closer intimacy with nature, a firmer reliance on it, as the only stock of wealth which the mind has to resort to, a more infantine simplicity of manners, a greater strength of affection, hopes longer cherished and longer deferred, sighs that the heart dare hardly heave, and 'thoughts that often lie too deep for tears'. We seem to feel that those who wrote and sung

them (the early minstrels) lived in the open air, wandering on from place to place with restless feet and thoughts, and lending an ever-open ear to the fearful accidents of war or love, floating on the breath of old tradition or common fame, and moving the strings of their harp with sounds that sank into a nation's heart. How fine an illustration of this is that passage in *Don Quixote*, where the knight and Sancho going in search of Dulcinea, inquire their way of the countryman, who was driving his mules to plough before break of day, 'singing the ancient ballad of Roncesvalles'. Sir Thomas Overbury describes his country girl as still accompanied with fragments of old songs. One of the best and most striking descriptions of the effects of this mixture of national poetry and music is to be found in one of the letters of Archbishop Herring, giving an account of a confirmation-tour in the mountains of Wales.

That pleasure over, our work became very arduous, for we were to mount a rock, and in many places of the road, over natural stairs of stono. I submitted to this, which they told me was but a taste of the country, and to prepare me for worse things to come. However, worse things did not come that morning, for we dined soon after out of our own wallets; and, though our inn stood in a place of the most frightful solitude, and the best formed for the habitation of monks (who once possessed it) in the world, yet we made a cheerful meal. The novelty of the thing gave me spirits, and the air gave me appetite much keener than the knife I ate with. We had our music too; for there came in a harper, who soon drew about us a group of figures that Hogarth would have given any price for. The harper was in his true place and attitude; a man and woman stood before him, singing to his instrument wildly, but not disagreeably; a little dirty child was playing with the bottom of the harp; a woman in a sick night-cap

hanging over the stairs; a boy with crutches, fixed in a staring attention, and a girl carding wool in the chimney, and rocking a cradle with her naked feet interrupted in her business by the charms of the music; all ragged and dirty, and all silently attentive. These figures gave us a most entertaining picture, and would please you or any man of observation; and one reflection gave me a particular comfort, that the assembly before us demonstrated that even here the influential sun warmed poor mortals, and inspired them with love and music.

I could wish that Mr Wilkie had been recommended to take this group as the subject of his admirable pencil; he has painted a picture of Bathsheba, instead.

In speaking of the old Scotch ballads, I need do no more than mention the name of *Auld Robin Gray*. The effect of reading this old ballad is as if all our hopes and fears hung upon the last fibre of the heart, and we felt that giving way. What silence, what loneliness, what leisure for grief and despair!

My father pressed me sair,
Though my mother did na' speak;
But she looked in my face
Till my heart was like to break.

The irksomeness of the situations, the sense of painful dependence, is excessive; and yet the sentiment of deep-rooted, patient affection triumphs over all, and is the only impression that remains. Lady Ann Bothwell's *Lament* is not, I think, quite equal to the lines beginning

O waly, waly, up the bank,
And waly, waly, down the brae,
And waly, waly, yon burn side,
Where I and my love went to gae.

I leant my back unto an aik,
 I thought it was a trusty tree;
 But first it bow'd, and syne it break,
 Sae my true-love's forsaken me.

O waly, waly, love is bonny,
 A little time while it is new;
 But when it's auld, it waxeth cauld.
 And fades awa' like the morning dew.
 Whan cockle-shells turn siller bells,
 And muscles grow on every tree,
 Whan frost and snaw sall warm us aw,
 Then sall my love prove true to me.

Now Arthur seat sall be my bed,
 The sheets sall ne'er be fyld by me:
 Saint Anton's well sall be my drink,
 Since my true-love's forsaken me.
 Martinmas wind, when wilt thou blaw,
 And shake the green leaves aff the tree?
 O gentle death, when wilt thou cum
 And tak' a life that wearies me?

'Tis not the frost that freezes sae,
 Nor blawing snaw's inclemencie,
 'Tis not sic cauld, that makes me cry,
 But my love's heart grown cauld to me.
 Whan we came in by Glasgow town,
 We were a comely sight to see,
 My love was clad in black velvet,
 And I myself in cramasie.

But had I wist, before I kist,
 That love had been sae hard to win;
 I'd lockt my heart in case of gowd,
 And pinn'd it with a siller pin.
 And oh! if my poor babe were born,
 And set upon the nurse's knee,
 And I mysel in the cold grave!
 Since my true-love's forsaken me.

The finest modern imitation of this style is the *Braes of Yarrow*; and perhaps the finest subject for a story of the same kind, in any modern

book, is that told in Turner's *History of England*, of a Mahometan woman, who, having fallen in love with an English merchant, the father of Thomas à Becket, followed him all the way to England, knowing only the word London, and the name of her lover, Gilbert.

But to have done with this, which is rather too serious a subject. The old English ballads are of a gayer and more lively turn. They are adventurous and romantic; but they relate chiefly to good living and good fellowship, to drinking and hunting scenes. Robin Hood is the chief of these, and he still, in imagination, haunts, Sherwood Forest. The archers green glimmer under the waving branches; the print on the grass remains where they have just finished their noontide meal under the green-wood tree; and the echo of their buglehorn and twanging bows resounds through the tangled mazes of the forest, as the tall slim deer glances startled by.

The trees in Sherwood Forest are old and good
 The grass beneath them now is dimly green:
 Are they deserted all? Is no young mien,
 With loose-slung bugle, met within the wood?

No arrow found—foil'd of its antler'd food—
 Struck in the oak's rude side?—Is there nought seen
 To mark the revelries which there have been,
 In the sweet days of merry Robin Hood?

Go there with summer, and with evening - go
 In the soft shadows, like some wand'ring man—
 And thou shalt far amid the forest know
 The archer-men in green, with belt and bow,
 Feasting on pheasant, river-fowl, and swan,
 With Robin at their head, and Marian.*

* *Sonnet on Sherwood Forest*, by J. H. Reynolds.

LECTURE VIII

ON THE LIVING POETS

No more of talk where God or Angel guest
With man, as with his friend, familiar us'd
To sit indulgent.

GENIUS is the heir of fame; but the hard condition on which the bright reversion must be earned is the loss of life. Fame is the recompense not of the living, but of the dead. The temple of fame stands upon the grave: the flame that burns upon its altars is kindled from the ashes of great men. Fame itself is immortal, but it is not begot till the breath of genius is extinguished. For fame is not popularity, the shout of the multitude, the idle buzz of fashion, the venal puff, the soothing flattery of favour or of friendship; but it is the spirit of a man surviving himself in the minds and thoughts of other men, undying and imperishable. It is the power which the intellect exercises over the intellect, and the lasting homage which is paid to it, as such, independently of time and circumstances, purified from partiality and evil-speaking. Fame is the sound which the stream of high thoughts, carried down to future ages, makes as it flows—deep, distant, murmuring evermore like the waters of the mighty ocean.

He who has ears truly touched to this music is in a manner deaf to the voice of popularity. The love of fame differs from mere vanity in this, that the one is immediate and personal, the other ideal and abstracted. It is not the direct and gross homage paid to himself, that the lover of true fame seeks or is proud of; but the indirect and pure homage paid to the eternal forms of truth and beauty as they are reflected in his mind, that gives him confidence and hope. The love of nature is the first thing in the mind of the true poet; the admiration of himself the last. A man of genius cannot well be a coxcomb; for his mind is too full of other things to be much occupied with his own person. He who is conscious of great powers in himself has also a high standard of excellence with which to compare his efforts: he appeals also to a test and judge of merit, which is the highest, but which is too remote, grave, and impartial, to flatter his self-love extravagantly, or puff him up with intolerable and vain conceit. This, indeed, is one test of genius and of real greatness of mind, whether a man can wait patiently and calmly for the award of posterity, satisfied with the unwearied exercise of his faculties, retired within the sanctuary of his own thoughts; or whether he is eager to forestal his own immortality, and mortgage it for a newspaper puff. He who thinks much of himself will be in danger of being forgotten by the rest of the world; he who is always trying to lay violent hands on reputation will not secure the best and most lasting. If the restless candidate for praise takes no pleasure, no sincere and heartfelt

delight in his works, but as they are admired and applauded by others, what should others see in them to admire or applaud? They cannot be expected to admire them because they are *his*; but for the truth and nature contained in them, which must first be inly felt and copied with severe delight, from the love of truth and nature, before it can ever appear there. Was Raphael, think you, when he painted his pictures of the Virgin and Child in all their inconceivable truth and beauty of expression, thinking most of his subject or of himself? Do you suppose that Titian, when he painted a landscape, was pluming himself on being thought the finest colourist in the world, or making himself so by looking at nature? Do you imagine that Shakespeare, when he wrote *Lear* or *Othello*, was thinking of any thing but *Lear* and *Othello*? Or that Mr Kean, when he plays these characters, is thinking of the audience!—No: he who would be great in the eyes of others must first learn to be nothing in his own. The love of fame, as it enters at times into his mind, is only another name for the love of excellence; or it is the ambition to attain the highest excellence, sanctioned by the highest authority—that of time.

Those minds, then, which are the most entitled to expect it, can best put up with the postponement of their claims to lasting fame. They can afford to wait. They are not afraid that truth and nature will ever wear out; will lose their gloss with novelty, or their effect with fashion. If their works have the seeds of immortality in them, they will live; if they have not, they care little about them as theirs. They

do not complain of the start which others have got of them in the race of everlasting renown, or of the impossibility of attaining the honours which time alone can give, during the term of their natural lives. They know that no applause, however loud and violent, can anticipate or overrule the judgment of posterity; that the opinion of no one individual, nor of any one generation can have the weight, the authority (to say nothing of the force of sympathy and prejudice), which must belong to that of successive generations. The brightest living reputation cannot be equally imposing to the imagination with that which is covered and rendered venerable with the hoar of innumerable ages. No modern production can have the same atmosphere of sentiment around it as the remains of classical antiquity. But then our moderns may console themselves with the reflection that they will be old in their turn, and will either be remembered with still increasing honours, or quite forgotten!

I would speak of the living poets as I have spoken of the dead (for I think highly of many of them); but I cannot speak of them with the same deference, because I do not feel it; with the same confidence, because I cannot have the same authority to sanction my opinion. I cannot be absolutely certain that anybody, twenty years hence, will think anything about any of them; but we may be pretty sure that Milton and Shakespeare will be remembered twenty years hence. We are, therefore, not without excuse if we husband our enthusiasm a little, and do not prematurely lay out our whole stock

in untried ventures, and what may turn out to be false bottoms. I have myself out-lived one generation of favourite poets, the Darwins, the Hayleys, the Swards. Who reads them now? If, however, I have not the verdict of posterity to bear me out in bestowing the most unqualified praises on their immediate successors, it is also to be remembered that neither does it warrant me in condemning them. Indeed, it was not my wish to go into this ungrateful part of the subject; but something of the sort is expected from me, and I must run the gauntlet as well as I can. Another circumstance that adds to the difficulty of doing justice to all parties is, that I happen to have had a personal acquaintance with some of these jealous votaries of the Muses: and that is not the likeliest way to imbibe a high opinion of the rest. Poets do not praise one another in the language of hyperbole. I am afraid, therefore, that I labour under a degree of prejudice against some of the most popular poets of the day, from an early habit of deference to the critical opinions of some of the least popular. I cannot say that I ever learnt much about Shakespeare or Milton, Spenser or Chaucer, from these professed guides; for I never heard them say much about them. They were always talking of themselves and one another. Nor am I certain that this sort of personal intercourse with living authors, while it takes away all real relish or freedom of opinion with regard to their contemporaries, greatly enhances our respect for themselves. Poets are not ideal beings; but have their prose-sides, like the commonest of the people. We often hear persons

say, What they would have given to have seen Shakespeare! For my part, I would give a great deal not to have seen him; at least, if he was at all like anybody else that I have ever seen. But why should he! for his works are not! This is, doubtless, one great advantage which the dead have over the living. It is always fortunate for ourselves and others when we are prevented from exchanging admiration for knowledge. The splendid vision that in youth haunts our idea of the poetical character, fades, upon acquaintance, into the light of common day; as the azure tints that deck the mountain's brow are lost on a nearer approach to them. It is well, according to the moral of one of the *Lyrical Ballads*; 'To leave Yarrow unvisited'. But to 'leave this face-making', and begin.

I am a great admirer of the female writers of the present day; they appear to me like so many modern muses. I could be in love with Mrs Inchbald, romantic with Mrs Radcliffe, and sarcastic with Madame D'Arblay: but they are novel-writers, and like Audrey, may 'thank the gods for not having made them poetical'. Did any one here ever read *Mrs Leicester's School*? If they have not, I wish they would; there will be just time before the next three volumes of the *Tales of My Landlord* come out. That is not a school of affectation, but of humanity. No one can think too highly of the work, or highly enough of the author.

The first poetess I can recollect is Mrs Barbauld, with whose works I became acquainted before those of any other author, male or female,

when I was learning to spell words of one syllable in her story-books for children. I became acquainted with her poetical works long after, in Enfield's *Speaker*; and remember being much divided in my opinion, at that time, between her *Ode to Spring* and Collin's *Ode to Evening*. I wish I could repay my childish debt of gratitude in terms of appropriate praise. She is a very pretty poetess; and, to my fancy, strews the flowers of poetry most agreeably round the borders of religious controversy. She is a neat and pointed prose-writer. Her *Thoughts on the Inconsistency of Human Expectations* is one of the most ingenious and sensible essays in the language. There is the same idea in one of Barrow's *Sermons*.

Mrs Hannah More is another celebrated modern poetess, and I believe still living. She has written a great deal which I have never read.

Miss Baillie must make up this trio of female poets. Her tragedies and comedies, one of each to illustrate each of the passions, separately, from the rest, are heresies in the dramatic art. She is a Unitarian in poetry. With her the passions are, like the French republic, one and indivisible: they are not so in nature, or in Shakespeare. Mr Southey has, I believe, somewhere expressed an opinion that the *Basil* of Miss Baillie is superior to *Romeo and Juliet*. I shall not stay to contradict him. On the other hand, I prefer her *De Montfort*, which was condemned on the stage, to same later tragedies, which have been more fortunate—to the *Remorse*, *Bertram*, and lastly *Fazio*. There is in the

chief character of that play a nerve, a continued unity of interest, a setness of purpose, and precision of outline which John Kemble alone was capable of giving; and there is all the grace which women have in writing. In saying that De Montfort was a character which just suited Mr Kemble, I mean to pay a compliment to both. He was not 'a man of no mark or likelihood', and what he could be supposed to do particularly well must have a meaning in it. As to the other tragedies just mentioned, there is no reason why any common actor should not 'make mouths in them at the invisible event'—one as well as another. Having thus expressed my sense of the merits of this authoress, I must add that her comedy of *The Election*, performed last summer at the Lyceum with indifferent success, appears to me the perfection of baby-house theatricals. Everything in it has such a *do-me-good* air, is so insipid and amiable. Virtue seems such a pretty playing at make believe, and vice is such a naughty word. It is a theory of some French author, that little girls ought not to be suffered to have dolls to play with, to call them *pretty dears*, to admire their black eyes and cherry cheeks, to lament and bewail over them if they fall down and hurt their faces, to praise them when they are good, and scold them when they are naughty. It is a school of affectation: Miss Baillie has profited of it. She treats her grown men and women as little girls treat their dolls, makes moral puppets of them, pulls the wires, and they talk virtue, and act vice, according to their cue and the title prefixed to each comedy or

tragedy, not from any real passions of their own, or love either of virtue or vice.

The transition from these to Mr Rogers's *Pleasures of Memory* is not far; he is a very lady-like poet. He is an elegant, but feeble writer. He wraps up obvious thoughts in a glittering cover of fine words; is full of enigmas with no meaning to them; is studiously inverted, and scrupulously far-fetched; and his verses are poetry, chiefly because no particle, line, or syllable of them reads like prose. He differs from Milton in this respect, who is accused of having inserted a number of prosaic lines in *Paradise Lost*. This kind of poetry, which is a more minute and inoffensive species of the Della Cruscan, is like the game of asking what one's thoughts are like. It is a tortuous, tottering, wriggling, fidgetty translation of every thing from the vulgar tongue, into all the tantalizing, teasing, tripping, lispng *mimminee-pimminee* of the highest brilliancy and fashion of poetical diction. You have nothing like truth of nature or simplicity of expression. The fastidious and languid reader is never shocked by meeting, from the rarest chance in the world, with a single homely phrase or intelligible idea. You cannot see the thought for the ambiguity of the language, the figure for the finery, the picture for the varnish. The whole is refined, and frittered away into an appearance of the most evanescent brilliancy and tremulous imbecility. There is no other fault to be found with the *Pleasures of Memory* than a want of taste and genius. The sentiments are amiable, and the notes at the end highly interesting, particu-

larly the one relating to the Countess' Pillar (as it is called) between Appleby and Penrith, erected (as the inscription tells the thoughtful traveller) by Anne, Countess of Pembroke, in the year 1648, in memory of her last parting with her good and pious mother in the same place in the year 1616,

To shew that power of love, how great,
Beyond all human estimate.

This story is also told in the poem, but with so many artful inuendos and tinsel words, that it is hardly intelligible, and still less does it reach the heart.

Campbell's *Pleasures of Hope* is of the same school, in which a painful attention is paid to the expression in proportion as there is little to express, and the decomposition of prose is substituted for the composition of poetry. How much the sense and keeping in the ideas are sacrificed to a jingle of words and epigrammatic turn of expression, may be seen in such lines as the following. One of the characters, an old invalid, wishes to end his days under:

Some hamlet shade, to yield his sickly form
Health in the breeze, and shelter in the storm.

Now the antithesis here totally fails: for it is the breeze, and not the tree, or, as it is quaintly expressed, *hamlet shade*, that affords health, though it is the tree that affords shelter in or from the storm. Instances of the same sort of *curiosa infelicitas* are not rare in this author. His verses on the *Battle of Hohenlinden* have considerable

spirit and animation. His *Gertrude of Wyoming* is his principal performance. It is a kind of historical paraphrase of Mr Wordsworth's poem of *Ruth*. It shows little power, or power enervated by extreme fastidiousness. It is:

Of outward show
Elaborate; of inward less exact.

There are painters who trust more to the setting of their pictures than to the truth of the likeness. Mr Campbell always seems to me to be thinking how his poetry will look when it comes to be hot-pressed on superfine wove paper, to have a disproportionate eye to points and commas, and dread of errors of the press. He is so afraid of doing wrong, of making the smallest mistake, that he does little or nothing. Lest he should wander irretrievably from the right path, he stands still. He writes according to established etiquette. He offers the Muses no violence. If he lights upon a good thought, he immediately drops it for fear of spoiling a good thing. When he launches a sentiment that you think will float him triumphantly for once to the bottom of the stanza, he stops short at the end of the first or second line, and stands shivering on the brink of beauty, afraid to trust himself to the fathomless abyss. *Tutus nimium, timidusque procellarum*. His very circumspection betrays him. The poet, as well as the woman, that deliberates, is undone. He is much like a man whose heart fails him just as he is going up in a balloon, and who breaks his neck by flinging himself out of it when it is too late. Mr Campbell too often maims and mangles his ideas before they

are fully formed, to form them to the Procrustes' bed of criticism; or strangles his intellectual offspring in the birth, lest they should come to an untimely end in the *Edinburgh Review*. He plays the hypercritic on himself, and starves his genius to death from a needless apprehension of a plethora. No writer who thinks habitually of the critics, either to tremble at their censures or set them at defiance, can write well. It is the business of reviewers to watch poets, not of poets to watch reviewers. There is one admirable simile in this poem, of the European child brought by the sooty Indian in his hand, 'like morning brought by night'. The love-scenes of *Gertrude of Wyoming* breathe a balmy voluptuousness of sentiment; but they are generally broken off in the middle; they are like the scent of a bank of violets, faint and rich, which the gale suddenly conveys in a different direction. Mr Campbell is careful of his own reputation, and economical of the pleasures of his readers. He treats them as the fox in the fable treated his guest the stork; or, to use his own expression, his fine things are,

Like angels' visits, few, and far between.*

There is another fault in this poem, which is the mechanical structure of the fable. The most striking events occur in the shape of antitheses. The story is cut into the form of a

* There is the same idea in Blair's *Grave*.

Its visits,

Like those of angels, short, and far between.

Mr Campbell, in altering the expression, has spoiled it. 'Few', and 'far between', are the same thing.

parallelogram. There is the same systematic alternation of good and evil, of violence and repose, that there is of light and shade in a picture. The Indian, who is the chief agent in the interest of the poem, vanishes and returns after long intervals, like the periodical revolutions of the planets. He unexpectedly appears just in the nick of time, after years of absence, and without any known reason but the convenience of the author and the astonishment of the reader; as if nature were a machine constructed on a principle of complete contrast, to produce a theatrical effect. *Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus.* Mr Campbell's savage never appears but upon great occasions, and then his punctuality is preternatural and alarming. He is the most wonderful instance on record of poetical *reliability*. The most dreadful mischiefs happen at the most mortifying moments; and when your expectations are wound up to the highest pitch, you are sure to have them knocked on the head by a premeditated and remorseless stroke of the poet's pen. This is done so often for the convenience of the author, that in the end it ceases to be for the satisfaction of the reader.

Tom Moore is a poet of a quite different stamp. He is as heedless, gay, and prodigal of his poetical wealth, as the other is careful, reserved, parsimonious. The genius of both is national. Mr Moore's Muse is another Ariel, as light, as tricky, as indefatigable, and as humane a spirit. His fancy is for ever on the wing, flutters in the gale, glitters in the sun. Everything lives, moves, and sparkles in his poetry, while over all

love waves his purple light. His thoughts are as restless, as many, and as bright, as the insects that people the sun's beam. 'So work the honey-bees', extracting liquid sweets from opening buds; so the butterfly expands its wings to the idle air; so the thistle's silver down is wafted over summer seas. An airy voyager on life's stream, his mind inhales the fragrance of a thousand shores, and drinks of endless pleasures under halcyon skies. Whenever his footsteps tend over the enamelled ground of fairy fiction,

Around him the bees in play flutter and cluster,
And gaudy butterflies frolic around.

The fault of Mr Moore is an exuberance of involuntary power. His facility of production lessens the effect of, and hangs as a dead weight upon, what he produces. His levity at last oppresses. The infinite delight he takes in such an infinite number of things creates indifference in minds less susceptible of pleasure than his own. He exhausts attention by being inexhaustible. His variety cloy; his rapidity dazzles and distracts the sight. The graceful ease with which he lends himself to every subject, the genial spirit with which he indulges in every sentiment, prevents him from giving their full force in the masses of things, from connecting them into a whole. He wants intensity, strength, and grandeur. His mind does not brood over the great and permanent; it glances over the surfaces, the first impressions of things, instead of grappling with the deep-rooted prejudices of the mind, its inveterate habits, and that 'perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart'. His pen, as

it is rapid and fanciful, wants momentum and passion. It requires the same principle to make us thoroughly like poetry that makes us like ourselves so well the feeling of continued identity. The impressions of Mr Moore's poetry are detached, desultory, and physical. Its gorgeous colours brighten and fade like the rainbow's. Its sweetness evaporates like the effluvia exhaled from beds of flowers! His gay laughing style, which relates to the immediate pleasures of love or wine, is better than his sentimental and romantic vein. His Irish melodies are not free from affectation and a certain sickliness of pretension. His serious descriptions are apt to run into flowery tenderness. His pathos sometimes melts into a mawkish sensibility, or crystallizes into all the prettinesses of allegorical language, and glittering hardness of external imagery. But he has wit at will, and of the first quality. His satirical and burlesque poetry is his best; it is firstrate. His *Twopenny Post-Bag* is a perfect 'nest of spicery', where the Cayenne is not spared. The politician there sharpens the poet's pen. In this, too, our bard resembles the bee—he has its honey and its sting.

Mr Moore ought not to have written *Lalla Rookh*, even for three thousand guineas. His fame is worth more than that. He should have minded the advice of Fadladeen. It is not, however, a failure, so much as an evasion, and a consequent disappointment, of public expectation. He should have left it to others to break conventions with nations, and faith with the world. He should, at any rate, have kept his with the public. *Lalla Rookh* is not what people wanted to see whether

Mr Moore could do—namely, whether he could write a long epic poem. It is four short tales. The interest, however, is often high-wrought and tragic, but the execution still turns to the effeminate and voluptuous side. Fortitude of mind is the first requisite of a tragic or epic writer. Happiness of nature, and felicity of genius are the pre-eminent characteristics of the bard of Erin. If he is not perfectly contented with what he is, all the world beside is. He had no temptation to risk anything in adding to the love and admiration of his age, and more than one country.

Therefore to be possessed with double pomp,
To guard a title that was rich before,
To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet,
To smooth the ice, or add another hue
Unto the rainbow, or with taper light
To seek the beauteous eye of heav'n to garnish,
Is wasteful and ridiculous excess,

The same might be said of Mr Moore's seeking to bind an epic crown, or the shadow of one, round his other laurels.

If Mr Moore has not suffered enough personally, Lord Byron (judging from the tone of his writings) might be thought to have suffered too much to be a truly great poet. If Mr Moore lays himself too open to all the various impulses of things, the outward shows of earth and sky, to every breath that blows, to every stray sentiment that crosses his fancy; Lord Byron shuts himself up too much in the impenetrable gloom of his own thoughts, and buries the natural light of things in 'nook monastic'. *The Giaour*,

The Corsair, *Childe Harold*, are all the same person, and they are apparently all himself. The everlasting repetition of one subject, the same dark ground of fiction, with the darker colours of the poet's mind spread over it, the unceasing accumulation of horrors on horror's head, steels the mind against the sense of pain as inevitably as the unwearied Siren sounds and luxurious monotony of Mr Moore's poetry make it inaccessible to pleasure.

Lord Byron's poetry is as morbid as Mr Moore's is careless and dissipated. He has more depth of passion, more force and impetuosity, but the passion is always of the same unaccountable character, at once violent and sullen, fierce and gloomy. It is not the passion of a mind struggling with misfortune, or the hopelessness of its desires, but of a mind preying upon itself, and disgusted with, or indifferent to, all other things. There is nothing less poetical than this sort of unaccommodating selfishness. There is nothing more repulsive than this sort of ideal absorption of all the interests of others, of the good and ills of life, in the ruling passion and moody abstraction of a single mind, as if it would make itself the centre of the universe, and there was nothing worth cherishing but its intellectual diseases. It is like a cancer, eating into the heart of poetry. But still there is power; and power rivets attention, and forces admiration. 'He hath a demon': and that is the next thing to being full of the God. His brow collects the scattered gloom; his eye flashes livid fire that withers and consumes. But still we watch the progress of the scathing bolt with interest,

and mark the ruin it leaves behind with awe. Within the contracted range of his imagination, he has great unity and truth of keeping. He chooses elements and agents congenial to his mind, the dark and glittering ocean, the frail bark hurrying before the storm, pirates and men that 'house on the wild sea with wild usages'. He gives the tumultuous eagerness of action, and the fixed despair of thought. In vigour of style and force of conception, he, in one sense, surpasses every writer of the present day. His indignant apothegms are like oracles of misanthropy. He who wishes for 'a curse to kill with', may find it in Lord Byron's writings. Yet he has beauty lurking underneath his strength, tenderness sometimes joined with the phrenzy of despair. A flash of golden light sometimes follows from a stroke of his pencil, like a falling meteor. The flowers that adorn his poetry bloom over charnel-houses and the grave!

There is one subject on which Lord Byron is fond of writing, on which I wish he would not write—Bonaparte. Not that I quarrel with his writing for him, or against him, but with his writing both for him and against him. What right has he to do this? Bonaparte's character, be it what else it may, does not change every hour according to his Lordship's varying humour. He is not a pipe for Fortune's finger, or for his Lordship's Muse, to play what stop she pleases on. Why should Lord Byron now laud him to the skies in the hour of his success, and then peevishly wreak his disappointment on the god of his idolatry? The man he writes of does

not rise or fall with circumstances: but 'looks on tempests, and is never shaken'. Besides, he is a subject for history, and not for poetry.

'Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread,
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
And in themselves their pride lies buried;
For at a frown they in their glory die.
The painful warrior, famoused for fight,
After a thousand victories once foil'd,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd.'

If Lord Byron will write anything more on this hazardous theme, let him take these lines of Shakespeare for his guide, and finish them in the spirit of the original—they will then be worthy of the subject.

Walter Scott is the most popular of all the poets of the present day, and deservedly so. He describes that which is most easily and generally understood with more vivacity and effect than anybody else. He has no excellences, either of a lofty or recondite kind, which lie beyond the reach of the most ordinary capacity to find out; but he has all the good qualities which all the world agree to understand. His style is clear, flowing, and transparent; his sentiments, of which his style is an easy and natural medium, are common to him with his readers. He has none of Mr Wordsworth's *idiosyncrasy*. He differs from his readers only in a greater range of knowledge and facility of expression. His poetry belongs to the class of *improvisatori* poetry. It has neither depth, height, nor breath in it; neither uncommon strength, nor uncommon refinement

of thought, sentiment, or language. It has no originality. But if this author has no research, no moving power in his own breast, he relies with the greater safety and success on the force of his subject. He selects a story such as is sure to please, full of incidents, characters, peculiar manners, costume, and scenery; and he tells it in a way that can offend no one. He never wearies or disappoints you. He is communicative and garrulous; but he is not his own hero. He never obtrudes himself on your notice to prevent your seeing the subject. What passes in the poem passes much as it would have done in reality. The author has little or nothing to do with it. Mr Scott has great intuitive power of fancy, great vividness of pencil in placing external objects and events before the eye. The force of his mind is picturesque, rather than *moral*. He gives more of the features of nature than the soul of passion. He conveys the distinct outlines and visible changes in outward objects, rather than 'their mortal consequences'. He is very inferior to Lord Byron in intense passion, to Moore in delightful fancy, to Mr Wordsworth in profound sentiment: but he has more picturesque power than any of them; that is, he places the objects themselves, about which *they* might feel and think, in a much more striking point of view, with greater variety of dress and attitude, and with more local truth of colouring. His imagery is Gothic, and grotesque. The manners and actions have the interest and curiosity belonging to a wild country and a distant period of time. Few descriptions have a more complete reality, a more striking

appearance of life and motion, than that of the warriors in *The Lady of the Lake*, who start up at the command of Roderick Dhu from their concealment under the fern, and disappear again in an instant. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Marmion* are the first, and perhaps the best, of his works. The Goblin Page, in the first of these, is a very interesting and inscrutable little personage. In reading these poems, I confess I am a little disconcerted, in turning over the page, to find Mr Westall's pictures, which always seem *fac-similes* of the persons represented, with ancient costume and a theatrical air. This may be a compliment to Mr Westall, but it is not one to Walter Scott. The truth is, there is a modern air in the midst of the antiquarian research of Mr Scott's poetry. It is history or tradition in masquerade. Not only the crust of old words and images is worn off with time, the substance is grown comparatively light and worthless. The forms are old and uncouth; but the spirit is effeminate and frivolous. This is a deduction from the praise I have given to his pencil for extreme fidelity, though it has been no obstacle to its drawing-room success. He has just hit the town, between the romantic and the fashionable; and, between the two, secured all classes of readers on his side. In a word, I conceive that he is to the great poet what an excellent mimic is to a great actor. There is no determinate impression left on the mind by reading his poetry. It has no results. The reader rises up from the perusal with new images and associations, but he remains the same man that he was before. A great mind is one that

moulds the minds of others. Mr Scott has put the Border Minstrelsy, and scattered traditions of the country, into easy, animated verse. But the Notes to his poems are just as entertaining as the poems themselves, and his poems are only entertaining.

Mr Wordsworth is the most original poet now living. He is the reverse of Walter Scott in his defects and excellences. He has nearly all that the other wants, and wants all that the other possesses. His poetry is not external, but internal; it does not depend upon tradition, or story, or old song, he furnishes it from his own mind, and is his own subject. He is the poet of mere sentiment. Of many of the *Lyrical Ballads*, it is not possible to speak in terms of too high praise, such as *Hart-leap Well*, *The Banks of the Wye*, *Poor Susan*, parts of the *Leech-gatherer*, the *Lines to a Cuckoo*, *To a Daisy*, *The Complaint*, several of the sonnets, and a hundred others of inconceivable beauty, of perfect originality and pathos. They open a finer and deeper vein of thought and feeling than any poet in modern times has done, or attempted. He has produced a deeper impression, and on a smaller circle, than any other of his contemporaries. His powers have been mistaken by the age, nor does he exactly understand them himself. He cannot form a whole. He has not the constructive faculty. He can give only the fine tones of thought, drawn from his mind by accident or nature, like the sounds drawn from the Æolian harp by the wandering gale. He is totally deficient in all the machinery of poetry. His *Excursion*, taken as a whole, notwithstanding

the noble materials thrown away in it, is a proof of this. The line labours, the sentiment moves slow, but the poem stands stock-still. The reader makes no way from the first line to the last. It is more than any thing in the world like Robinson Crusoe's boat, which would have been an excellent good boat, and would have carried him to the other side of the globe, but that he could not get it out of the sand where it stuck fast. I did what little I could to help to launch it at the time, but it would not do. I am not, however, one of those who laugh at the attempts or failures of men of genius. It is not my way to cry 'Long life to the conqueror'. Success and desert are not with me synonymous terms; and the less Mr Wordsworth's general merits have been understood, the more necessary is it to insist upon them. This is not the place to repeat what I have already said on the subject. The reader may turn to it in the *Round Table* *. I do not think, however, there is anything in the larger poem equal to many of the detached pieces in the *Lyrical Ballads*. As Mr Wordsworth's poems have been little known to the public, or chiefly through garbled extracts from them, I will here give an entire poem (one that has always been a favourite with me), that the reader may know what it is that the admirers of this author find to be delighted with in his poetry. Those who do not feel the beauty and the force of it may save themselves the trouble of inquiring farther.

* The criticism referred to will be found in the Appendix.

HART-LEAP WELL

The knight had ridden down from Wensley moor
With the slow motion of a summer's cloud:
He turned aside towards a vassal's door,
And, 'Bring another horse!' he cried aloud.

'Another horse!'—That shout the vassal heard,
And saddled his best steed, a comely gray;
Sir Walter mounted him; he was the third
Which he had mounted on that glorious day.

Joy sparkled in the prancing courser's eyes:
The horse and horseman are a happy pair;
But, though Sir Walter like a falcon flies,
There is a doleful silence in the air.

A rout this morning left Sir Walter's hall,
That as they galloped made the echoes roar;
But horse and man are vanished, one and all;
Such race, I think, was never seen before.

Sir Walter, restless as a veering wind,
Calls to the few tired dogs that yet remain:
Brach, Swift, and Music, noblest of their kind,
Follow, and up the weary mountain strain.

The knight hallooed, he chid and cheered them on
With suppliant gestures and upbraidings stern;
But breath and eye-sight fail; and, one by one,
The dogs are stretched among the mountain fern.

Where is the throng, the tumult of the race?
The bugles that so joyfully were blown?
—This chase it looks not like an earthly chase;
Sir Walter and the hart are left alone.

The poor hart toils along the mountain side;
I will not stop to tell how far he fled,
Nor will I mention by what death he died;
But now the knight beholds him lying dead.

Dismounting then, he leaned against a thorn;
He had no follower, dog, nor man, nor boy:
He neither smacked his whip nor blew his horn,
But gazed upon the spoil with silent joy.

Close to the thorn on which Sir Walter leaned,
Stood his dumb partner in this glorious act;
Weak as a lamb the hour that it is yeaned;
And foaming like a mountain cataract.

Upon his side the hart was lying stretched:
His nose half-touched a spring beneath a hill,
And, with the last deep groan his breath had fetched,
The waters of the spring were trembling still.

And now, too happy for repose or rest,
(Was never man in such a joyful case!)
Sir Walter walked all round, north, south, and west,
And gazed, and gazed upon that darling place.

And climbing up the hill—(it was at least,
Nine roods of sheer ascent) Sir Walter found
Three several hoof-marks which the hunted beast
Had left imprinted on the verdant ground.

Sir Walter wiped his face, and cried, 'Till now,
Such sight was never seen by living eyes:
Three leaps have borne him from this lofty brow,
Down to the very fountain where he lies.

I'll build a pleasure-house upon this spot,
And a small arbour, made for rural joy;
'Twill be the traveller's shed, the pilgrim's cot,
A place of love for damsels that are coy.

A cunning artist will I have to frame
A bason for that fountain in the dell;
And they, who do make mention of the same
From this day forth, shall call it HART-LEAP WELL.

And, gallant brute! to make thy praises known,
Another monument shall here be raised;
Three several pillars, each a rough-hewn stone,
And planted where thy hoofs the turf have grazed.

And, in the summer-time when days are long,
I will come hither with my paramour;
And with the dancers, and the minstrel's song,
We will make merry in that pleasant bower.

Till the foundations of the mountains fail,
 My mansion with its arbour shall endure;—
 The joy of them who till the fields of Swale,
 And them who dwell among the woods of Ure!’

Then home he went, and left the hart, stone dead,
 With breathless nostrils stretched above the spring,
 —Soon did the knight perform what he had said,
 And far and wide the fame thereof did ring.

Ere thrice the moon into her port had steered,
 A cup of stone received the living well;
 Three pillars of rude stone Sir Walter reared,
 And built a house of pleasure in the dell.

And near the fountain, flowers of stature tall
 With trailing plants and trees were intertwined,—
 Which soon composed a little sylvan hall,
 A leafy shelter from the sun and wind.

And thither, when the summer-days were long,
 Sir Walter journeyed with his paramour;
 And with the dancers and the minstrel’s song
 Made merriment within that pleasant bower.

The knight, Sir Walter, died in course of time,
 And his bones lie in his paternal vale.—
 But there is matter for a second rhyme,
 And I to this would add another tale.

PART SECOND

The moving accident is not my trade:
 To freeze the blood I have no ready arts:
 ’Tis my delight, alone in summer shade,
 To pipe a simple song for thinking hearts.

As I from Hawes to Richmond did repair,
 It chanced that I saw, standing in a dell,
 Three aspens at three corners of a square,
 And one, not four yards distant, near a well.

What this imported I could ill divine:
 And, pulling now the rein my horse to stop,
 I saw three pillars standing in a line,
 The last stone pillar on a dark hill-top.

The trees were grey, with neither arms nor head;
Half-wasted the square mound of tawny green;
So that you just might say, as then I said,
‘Here in old time the hand of man hath been.’

I looked upon the hill, both far and near,
More doleful place did never eye survey;
It seemed as if the spring-time came not here,
And Nature here were willing to decay.

I stood in various thoughts and fancies lost;
When one, who was in shepherd’s garb attired,
Came up the hollow:—him did I accost,
And what this place might be I then inquired.

The shepherd stopped, and that same story told
Which in my former rhyme I have rehearsed.
‘A jolly place,’ said he, ‘in times of old!
But something ails it now; the spot is curst.

You see these lifeless stumps of aspen wood—
Some say that they are beeches, others elms—
These were the bower; and here a mansion stood,
The finest palace of a hundred realms!

The harbour does its own condition tell;
You see the stones, the fountain, and the stream;
But as to the great lodge! you might as well
Hunt half a day for a forgotten dream.

There’s neither dog nor heifer, horse nor sheep,
Will wet his lips within that cup of stone;
And oftentimes, when all are fast asleep,
This water doth send forth a dolorous groan.

Some say that here a murder has been done,
And blood cries out for blood: but, for my part,
I’ve guessed, when I’ve been sitting in the sun,
That it was all for that unhappy hart.

What thoughts must through the creature’s brain have
passed!

Even from the topmost stone, upon the steep,
Are but three bounds—and look, Sir, at this last—
O Master! it has been a cruel leap.

For thirteen hours he ran a desperate race;
And in my simple mind we cannot tell
What cause the hart might have to love this place,
And come and make his death-bed near the well.

Here on the grass, perhaps, asleep he sank,
Lulled by this fountain in the summer-tide;
This water was perhaps the first he drank
When he had wandered from his mother's side.

In April here beneath the scented thorn
He heard the birds their morning carols sing;
And he, perhaps, for aught we know, was born
Not half a furlong from that self-same spring.

But now here's neither grass nor pleasant shade;
The sun on drearier hollow never shone;
So will it be, as I have often said,
Till trees, and stones, and fountain all are gone.'

'Grey-headed Shepherd, thou hast spoken well;
Small difference lies between thy creed and mine:
This beast not unobserved by Nature fell;
His death was mourned by sympathy divine.

The Being that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep and reverential care
For the unoffending creatures whom he loves.

The pleasure-house is dust:—behind, before,
This is no common waste, no common gloom;
But Nature, in due course of time, once more
Shall here put on her beauty and her bloom.

She leaves these objects to a slow decay,
That what we are, and have been, may be known;
But, at the coming of the milder day,
These monuments shall all be overgrown.

One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
Taught both by what she shows, and what conceals,
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.'

Mr Wordsworth is at the head of that which has been denominated the Lake School of poetry; a school which, with all my respect for it, I do not think sacred from criticism or exempt from faults, of some of which faults I shall speak with becoming frankness; for I do not see that the liberty of the press ought to be shackled, or freedom of speech curtailed, to screen either its revolutionary or renegade extravagances. This school of poetry had its origin in the French Revolution, or rather in those sentiments and opinions which produced that revolution; and which sentiments and opinions were indirectly imported into this country in translations from the German about that period. Our poetical literature had, towards the close of the last century, degenerated into the most trite, insipid, and mechanical of all things, in the hands of the followers of Pope and the old French school of poetry. It wanted something to stir it up, and it found that something in the principles and events of the French Revolution. From the impulse it thus received, it rose at once from the most servile imitation and tamest commonplace to the utmost pitch of singularity and paradox. The change in the belles-lettres was as complete, and to many persons as startling, as the change in politics with which it went hand in hand. There was a mighty ferment in the heads of statesmen and poets, kings and people. According to the prevailing notions, all was to be natural and new. Nothing that was established was to be tolerated. All the commonplace figures of poetry, tropes, allegories, personifications, with the whole heathen mytho-

logy, were instantly discarded; a classical allusion was considered as a piece of antiquated foppery; capital letters were no more allowed in print than letters-patent of nobility were permitted in real life; kings and queens were dethroned from their rank and station in legitimate tragedy or epic poetry, as they were decapitated elsewhere; rhyme was looked upon as a relic of the feudal system, and regular metre was abolished along with regular government. Authority and fashion, elegance or arrangement, were hooted out of countenance, as pedantry and prejudice. Everyone did that which was good in his own eyes. The object was to reduce all things to an absolute level; and a singularly affected and outrageous simplicity prevailed in dress and manners, in style and sentiment. A striking effect produced where it was least expected, something new and original, no matter whether good, bad, or indifferent, whether mean or lofty, extravagant or childish, was all that was aimed at, or considered as compatible with sound philosophy and an age of reason. The licentiousness grew extreme: Coryate's *Crudities* were nothing to it. The world was to be turned topsy-turvy; and poetry, by the goodwill of our Adam-wits, was to share its fate, and begin *de novo*. It was a time of promise, a renewal of the world and of letters; and the Deucalions, who were to perform this feat of regeneration, were the present poet-laureate and the two authors of the *Lyrical Ballads*. The Germans, who made heroes of robbers, and honest women of cast-off mistresses, had already exhausted the extravagant and mar-

vellous in sentiment and situation; our native writers adopted a wonderful simplicity of style and matter. The paradox they set out with was that all things are by nature equally fit subjects for poetry; or that, if there is any preference to be given, those that are the meanest and most unpromising are the best, as they leave the greatest scope for the unbounded stores of thought and fancy in the writer's own mind. Poetry had with them 'neither buttress nor coigne of vantage to make its pendant bed and procreant cradle'. It was not 'born so high: its airy buildeth in the cedar's top, and dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun'. It grew like a mushroom out of the ground; or was hidden in it like a truffle, which it required a particular sagacity and industry to find out and dig up. They founded the new school on a principle of sheer humanity, on pure nature void of art. It could not be said of these sweeping reformers and dictators in the republic of letters, that 'in their train walked crowns and crownets; that realms and islands, like plates, dropt from their pockets': but they were surrounded, in company with the Muses, by a mixed rabble of idle apprentices and Botany Bay convicts, female vagrants, gipsies, meek daughters in the family of Christ, of idiot boys and mad mothers, and after them 'owls and night-ravens flew'. They scorned 'degrees, priority, and place, insisture, course, proportion, season, form, office, and custom, in all line of order': the distinctions of birth, the vicissitudes of fortune, did not enter into their abstracted, lofty, and levelling calculation of human nature.

He who was more than man with them was none. They claimed kindred only with the commonest of the people: peasants, pedlars, and village-barbers were their oracles and bosom friends. Their poetry, in the extreme to which it professedly tended, and was in effect carried, levels all distinctions of nature and society; has 'no figures nor no fantasies', which the prejudices of superstition or the customs of the world draw in the brains of men; 'no trivial fond records' of all that has existed in the history of past ages; it has no adventitious pride, pomp, or circumstance, to set it off; 'the marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe'; neither tradition, reverence, nor ceremony, 'that to great ones 'longs': it breaks in pieces the golden images of poetry, and defeats its armorial bearings, to melt them down in the mould of common humanity or of its own upstart self-sufficiency. They took the same method in their new-fangled 'metre ballad-mongering' scheme, which Rousseau did in his prose paradoxes—of exciting attention by reversing the established standards of opinion and estimation in the world. They were for bringing poetry back to its primitive simplicity and state of nature, as he was for bringing society back to the savage state: so that the only thing remarkable left on the world by this change would be the persons who had produced it. A thorough adept in this school of poetry and philanthropy is jealous of all excellence but his own. He does not even like to share his reputation with his subject; for he would have it all to proceed from his own power and originality of mind. Such a one is slow to admire any thing that is

admirable; feels no interest in what is most interesting to others, no grandeur in any thing grand, no beauty in any thing beautiful. He tolerates only what he himself creates; he sympathises only with what can enter into no competition with him, with 'the bare trees and mountains bare, and grass in the green field'. He sees nothing but himself and the universe. {

He hates all greatness and all pretensions to it, whether well or ill founded. His egotism is in some respects a madness; for he scorns even the admiration of himself, thinking it a presumption in any one to suppose that he has taste or sense enough to understand him. He hates all science and all art; he hates chemistry, he hates conchology; he hates Voltaire; he hates Sir Isaac Newton; he hates wisdom; he hates wit; he hates metaphysics, which, he says, are unintelligible, and yet he would be thought to understand them; he hates prose; he hates all poetry but his own; he hates the dialogues in Shakespeare; he hates music, dancing and painting; he hates Rubens, he hates Rembrandt; he hates Raphael, he hates Titian; he hates Vandyke; he hates the antique; he hates the Apollo Belvidere; he hates the Venus of Medicis. This is the reason that so few people take an interest in his writings, because he takes an interest in nothing that others do! The effect has been perceived as something odd; but the cause or principle has never been distinctly traced to its source before, as far as I know. The proofs are to be found every where—in Mr Southey's *Botany Bay Eclogues*, in his book of Songs and Sonnets, his Odes and Inscriptions, so well

parodied in the *Anti-Jacobin Review*, in his *Joan of Arc*, and last, though not least, in his *Wat Tyler*:

When Adam delved, and Eve span,
Where was then the gentleman?

(or the poet laureate either, we may ask?)—in Mr Coleridge's *Ode to an Ass's Foal*, in his *Lines to Sarah*, his *Religious Musings*; and in his and Mr Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, *passim*.

Of Mr Southey's larger epics, I have but a faint recollection at this distance of time, but all that I remember of them is mechanical and extravagant, heavy and superficial. His affected, disjointed style is well imitated in the *Rejected Addresses*. The difference between him and Sir Richard Blackmore seems to be that the one is heavy and the other light, the one solemn and the other pragmatism, the one phlegmatic and the other flippant; and that there is no Gay in the present time to give a Catalogue Raisonné of the performances of the living undertaker of epics. *Kehama* is a loose sprawling figure, such as we see cut out of wood or paper, and pulled or jerked with wire or thread, to make sudden and surprising motions, without meaning, grace, or nature in them. By far the best of his works are some of his shorter personal compositions, in which there is an ironical mixture of the quaint and serious, such as his *Lines on a picture of Gaspar Poussin*, the fine tale of *Gualberto*, his *Description of a Pig*, and the *Holly-tree*, which is an affecting, beautiful, and modest retrospect on his own character. May the aspiration with which it

concludes be fulfilled!* But the little he has done of true and sterling excellence is overloaded by the quantity of indifferent matter which he turns out every year, 'prosing or versing', with equally mechanical and irresistible facility. His essays, or political and moral disquisitions, are *not* so full of original matter as

* O reader! hast thou ever stood to see
The Holly Tree?
The eye that contemplates it well perceives
Its glossy leaves,
Ordered by an intelligence so wise
As might confound the Atheist's sophistries.

Below, a circling fence, its leaves are seen
Wrinkled and keen;
No grazing cattle through their prickly round
Can reach to wound;
But as they grow where nothing is to fear,
Smooth and unarm'd the pointless leaves appear.

I love to view these things with curious eyes,
And moralize;
And in the wisdom of the Holly Tree
Can emblems see
Wherewith perchance to make a pleasant rhyme,
Such as may profit in the after time.

So, though abroad perchance I might appear
Harsh and austere,
To those who on my leisure would intrude
Reserved and rude,
Gentle at home amid my friends I'd be,
Like the high leaves upon the Holly Tree.

And should my youth, as youth is apt, I know,
Some harshness show,
All vain asperities I day by day
Would wear away,
Till the smooth temper of my age should be
Like the high leaves upon the Holly Tree.

Montaigne's. They are second or third rate compositions in that class.

It remains that I should say a few words of Mr Coleridge; and there is no one who has a better right to say what he thinks of him than I have. 'Is there here any dear friend of Caesar? To him I say, that Brutus's love to Caesar was no less than his'. But no matter. His *Ancient Mariner* is his most remarkable performance, and the only one that I could point out to any one as giving an adequate idea of his great natural powers. It is high German, however, and in it he seems to 'conceive of poetry but as a drunken dream, reckless, careless, and heedless, of past, present, and to come'. His tragedies (for he has written two) are not answerable to it; they are, except a few poetical passages, drawling sentiment and metaphysical jargon. He has no genuine dramatic talent. There is one fine passage in his *Christabel*, that which contains the description of the quarrel between Sir Leoline and Sir Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine, who had been friends in youth.

And as when all the summer trees are seen
So bright and green,
The Holly leaves their fadeless hues display
Less bright than they,
But when the bare and wintry woods we see,
What then so cheerful as the Holly Tree?

So serious should my youth appear among
The thoughtless throng,
So would I seem amid the young and gay
More grave than they,
That in my age as cheerful I might be
As the green winter of the Holly Tree.

Alas! they had been friends in youth,
 But whispering tongues can poison truth;
 And constancy lives in realms above!
 And life is thorny! and youth is vain;
 And to be wroth with one we love,
 Doth work like madness in the brain:
 And thus it chanc'd as I divine,
 With Roland and Sir Leoline.

Each spake words of high disdain
 And insult to his heart's best brother,
 And parted ne'er to meet again!
 But neither ever found another
 To free the hollow heart from paining—

They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
 Like cliffs which had been rent asunder:
 A dreary sea now flows between,
 But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,
 Shall wholly do away I ween
 The marks of that which once hath been.

Sir Leoline a moment's space
 Stood gazing on the damsel's face;
 And the youthful lord of Tryermaine
 Came back upon his heart again.

It might seem invidious if I were to praise his ode entitled *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter*, as an effusion of high poetical enthusiasm, and strong poetical feeling. His *Sonnet to Schiller* conveys a fine compliment to the author of *The Robbers*, and an equally fine idea of the state of youthful enthusiasm in which he composed it.

Schiller! that hour I would have wish'd to die,
 If through the shudd'ring midnight I had sent
 From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent,
 That fearful voice, a famish'd father's cry—

That in no after moment aught less vast
 Might stamp me mortal! A triumphant shout
 Black Horror scream'd, and all her goblin rout
 From the more with'ring scene diminish'd pass'd,

Ah! Bard tremendous in sublimity!
Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood,
Wand'ring at eve, with finely frenzied eye,
Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood!
Awhile, with mute awe gazing, I would brood,
Then weep aloud in a wild ecstasy!

His *Conciones ad Populum*, *Watchman*, etc. are dreary trash. Of his *Friend*, I have spoken the truth elsewhere. But I may say of him here, that he is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt any thing. There is only one thing he could learn from me in return, but *that* he has not. He was the first poet I ever knew. His genius at that time had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on for ever; and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort; but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought. His mind was clothed with wings; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to heaven. In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty, in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob's ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him then, listen to him now? Not I! That spell is broke; that time is gone for ever; that voice is heard no more; but still the recollection comes rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound.

What though the radiance which was once so bright,
Be now for ever vanish'd from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flow'r;

I do not grieve, but rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy,
Which, having been, must ever be
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;

In years that bring the philosophic mind!

I have thus gone through the task I intended, and have come at last to the level ground. I have felt my subject gradually sinking from under me as I advanced, and have been afraid of ending in nothing. The interest has unavoidably decreased at almost every successive step of the progress, like a play that has its catastrophe in the first or second act. This, however, I could not help. I have done as well as I could.

APPENDIX

I

ON MILTON'S *Lycidas*

At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue.
To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new.

OF all Milton's smaller poems, *Lycidas* is the greatest favourite with me. I cannot agree to the charge which Dr Johnson has brought against it of pedantry and want of feeling. It is the fine emanation of classical sentiment in a youthful scholar—'most musical, most melancholy'. A certain tender gloom overspreads it, a wayward abstraction, a forgetfulness of his subject. in the serious reflections that arise out of it. The gusts of passion come and go like the sounds of music borne on the wind. The loss of the friend, whose death he laments, seems to have recalled with double force the reality of those speculations which they had indulged together; we are transported to classic ground, and a mysterious strain steals responsive on the ear while we listen to the poet,

With eager thought warbling his Doric lay.

I shall proceed to give a few passages at length in support of my opinion. The first I shall quote is as remarkable for the truth and sweetness of the natural descriptions as for the characteristic elegance of the allusions.

Together both, ere the high lawn appear'd
Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,
We drove a-field; and both together heard
What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
Oft still the star, that rose at evening bright,
Towards Heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel.
Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,
Temper'd to the oaten flute:
Rough satyrs danced, and fauns with cloven heel
From the glad sound would not be absent long,
And old Dametas loved to hear our song.
But oh! the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!
Thee, shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves
With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes, mourn.
The willows and the hazel copses green
Shall now no more be seen
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.
As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the white-thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd's ear!

After the fine apostrophe on Fame which Phœbus is invoked to utter, the poet proceeds:—

Oh fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'd flood,
Smooth sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocal reeds,
That strain I heard was of a higher mood;
But now my oat proceeds,
And listens to the herald of the sea
That came in Neptune's plea.
He ask'd the waves, and ask'd the felon winds,
What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?
And question'd every gust of rugged winds
That blows from off each beaked promontory.
They knew not of his story:
And sage Hippotades their answer brings,
That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd,
The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panope with all her sisters play'd.

If this is art, it is perfect art; nor do we wish for anything better. The measure of the verse, the very sound of the names, would almost produce the effect here described. To ask the poet not to make use of such allusions as these is to ask the painter not to dip in the colours of the rainbow, if he could. In fact, it is the common cant of criticism to consider every allusion to the classics, and particularly in a mind like Milton's, as pedantry and affectation. Habit is a second nature; and, in this sense, the pedantry (if it is to be so called) of the scholastic enthusiast, who is constantly referring to images of which his mind is full, is as graceful as it is natural. It is not affectation in him to recur to ideas and modes of expression with which he has the strongest associations, and in which he takes the greatest delight. Milton was as conversant with the world of genius before him as with the world of nature about him; the fables of the ancient mythology were as familiar to him as his dreams. To be a pedant is to see neither the beauties of nature nor of art. Milton saw both; and he made use of the one only to adorn and give new interest to the other. He was a passionate admirer of nature; and, in a single couplet of his, describing the moon:

Like one that had been led astray
Through the heaven's wide pathless way,

there is more intense observation, and intense feeling of nature (as if he had gazed himself blind in looking at her), than in twenty volumes of descriptive poetry. But he added in his own observation of nature the splendid fictions of ancient genius, enshrined her in the mysteries of ancient religion, and celebrated her with the pomp of ancient names.

Next Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow,
His mantle airy, and his bonnet sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.
Oh! who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest pledge?
Last came and last did go,
The pilot of the Galilean lake.

There is a wonderful correspondence in the rhythm of these lines to the ideas which they convey. This passage, which alludes to the clerical character of *Lycidas*, has been found fault with, as combining the truths of the Christian religion with the fiction of the Heathen mythology. I conceive there is very little foundation for this objection, either in reason or good taste. I will not go so far as to defend Camoens, who in his *Lusiad*, makes Jupiter send Mercury with a dream to propagate the Catholic religion; nor do I know that it is generally proper to introduce the two things in the same poem, though I see no objection to it here; but of this I am quite sure, that there is no inconsistency or natural repugnance between this poetical and religious faith in the same mind. To the understanding, the belief of the one is incompatible with that of the other; but, in the imagination, they not only may, but do constantly, co-exist. I will venture to go farther, and maintain, that every classical scholar, however orthodox a Christian he may be, is an honest Heathen at heart. This requires explanation. Whoever, then, attaches a reality to any idea beyond the mere name, has, to a certain extent (though not an abstract), an habitual and practical belief in it. Now, to any one familiar with the names of the personages of the Heathen mythology, they convey a positive identity beyond the mere name. We refer them to something out of ourselves. It is only by an effort of abstraction that we divest ourselves of the idea of their

reality: all our involuntary prejudices are on their side. This is enough for the poet. They impose on the imagination by all the attractions of beauty and grandeur. They come down to us in sculpture and in song. We have the same associations with them as if they had really been; for the belief of the fiction in ancient times had produced all the same effects as the reality could have done. It was a reality to the minds of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and through them it is reflected to us. And, as we shape towers, and men, and armed steeds, out of the broken clouds that glitter in the distant horizon, so, throned above the ruins of the ancient world, Jupiter still nods sublime on the top of blue Olympus. Hercules leans upon his club, Apollo has not laid aside his bow, nor Neptune his trident; the sea-gods ride upon the sounding waves, the long procession of heroes and demi-gods passes in endless review before us, and still we hear:

The muses in a ring
Aye round about Jove's altar sing:

Have sight of Proteus coming from the sea,
And hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

If all these mighty fictions had really existed, they could have done no more for us!—I shall only give one other passage from *Lycidas*; but I flatter myself that it will be a treat to my readers, if they are not already familiar with it. It is the passage which contains that exquisite description of the flowers:

Return, Alpheus; the dread voice is past
That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian Muse,
And call the vales, and bid them hither cast
Their bells and flow'rets of a thousand hues.
Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use
Of shades and wanton winds and gushing brooks,

On whose fresh lap the swart-star sparely looks,
Throw hither all your quaint enamell'd eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honeyed showers,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers;
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet,
The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,
With cowslips wan, that hang the pensive head.
And every flower, that sad embroidery wears;
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
To strew the laureat herse where Lycid lies.
For so to interpose a little cause,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.
Ah me! Whilst thee the shores and sounding seas
Waft far away, where'er thy bones are hurl'd,
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,
Sleep'st by the fables of Bellerus old,
Where the great vision of the guarded mount
Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold.
Look homeward, Angel, now, and melt with ruth,
And, O ye Dolphins, waft the hapless youth.

Dr Johnson is very much offended at the introduction of these Dolphins; and indeed, if he had had to guide them through the waves, he would have made much the same figure as his old friend Dr Burney does, swimming in the *Thames* with his wig on, with the water-nymphs, in the picture of Barry, at the Adelphi.

There is a description of flowers in the *Winter's Tale*, which I shall give as a parallel to Milton's. I shall leave my readers to decide which is the finest; for I dare not give the preference. Perdita says:

Here's flowers for you,
Hot lavender, mints, savoury, marjoram,

The marygold that goes to bed with the sun,
And with him rises, weeping; these are flowers
Of middle summer, and I think they are given
To men of middle age. Y'are welcome.

Camillo. I should leave grazing, were I of your flock,
And only live by gazing.

Perdita. Out, alas!

You'd be so lean that blasts of January
Would blow you through and through. Now, my fairest
friends,

I would I had some flowers o' th' spring, that might
Become your time of day: O Proserpina,
For the flowers now that, frightened, you let fall
From Dis's waggon! daffodils.

That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength, a malady
Most incident to maids; bold oxlips, and
The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,
The flower de lis being one. O these I lack
To make you garlands of, and my sweet friend
To strew him o'er and o'er.

Dr Johnson's general remark, that Milton's genius had not room to shew itself in his smaller pieces, is not well-founded. Not to mention *Lycidas*, the *Allegro*, and *Penseroso*, it proceeds on a false estimate of the merits of his great work, which is not more distinguished by strength and sublimity than by tenderness and beauty. The last were as essential qualities of Milton's mind as the first. The battle of the angels, which has been commonly considered as the best part of the *Paradise Lost*, is the worst.

II

ON THE CHARACTER OF MILTON'S EVE

THE difference between the character of *Eve* in Milton, and Shakespeare's female characters is very striking, and it appears to me to be this: Milton describes Eve not only as full of love and tenderness for Adam, but as the constant object of admiration in herself. She is the idol of the poet's imagination, and he paints her whole person with a studied profusion of charms. She is the wife, but she is still as much as ever the mistress, of Adam. She is represented, indeed, as devoted to her husband, as twining round him for rapport, 'as the vine curls her tendrils', but her own grace and beauty are never lost sight of in the picture of conjugal felicity. Adam's attention and regard are as much turned to her as hers to him; for 'in the first garden of their innocence', he had no other objects or pursuits to distract his attention; she was both his business and his pleasure. Shakespeare's females, on the contrary, seem to exist only in their attachment to others. They are pure abstractions of the affections. Their features are not painted, nor the colour of their hair. Their hearts only are laid open. We are acquainted with Imogen, Miranda, Ophelia, or Desdemona by what they thought and felt, but we cannot tell whether they were black, brown, or fair. But Milton's Eve is all of ivory and gold. Shakespeare seldom tantalizes the reader with a luxurious display of the personal charms of his heroines, with a curious inventory of particular beauties, except indirectly, and for some other purpose, as where Iachimo describes Imogen

asleep, or the old men in *The Winter's Tale* vie with each other in invidious praise of Perdita. Even in Juliet, the most voluptuous and glowing of the class of characters here spoken of, we are reminded chiefly of circumstances connected with the physiognomy of passion, as in her leaning with her cheek upon her arm, or which only convey the general impression of enthusiasm made on her lover's brain. One thing may be said, that Shakespeare had not the same opportunities as Milton: for his women were clothed, and it can not be denied that Milton took Eve at a considerable disadvantage in the respect. He has accordingly described her in all the loveliness of nature, tempting to sight as the fruit of the Hesperides guarded by that Dragon old, herself the fairest among the flowers of Paradise!

The figures of both Adam and Eve are very prominent in this poem. As there is little action in it, the interest is constantly kept up by the beauty and grandeur of the images. They are thus introduced:

Two of far nobler shape, erect and tall,
 Godlike erect, with native honour clad,
 In naked majesty seemed lords of all,
 And worthy seemed; for in their looks divine
 The image of their glorious Maker shone:

* * * * *

Though both
 Not equal, as their sex not equal seem'd;
 For contemplation he and valour form'd,
 For softness she and sweet attractive grace;
 He for God only, she for God in him.
 His fair large front and eye sublime declar'd
 Absolute rule; and hyacinthine locks
 Round from his parted forelock manly hung
 Clust'ring, but not beneath his shoulders broad;
 She as a veil down to the slender waist
 Her unadorned golden tresses wore
 Dishevell'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd

As the vine curls her tendrils, which implied
 Subjection, but required with gentle sway,
 And by her yielded, by him best receiv'd,
 Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
 And sweet reluctant amorous delay.

Eve is not only represented as beautiful, but with conscious beauty. Shakespeare's heroines are almost insensible of their charms, and wound without knowing it. They are not coquets. If the salvation of mankind had depended upon one of them, we don't know—but the devil might have been balked. This is but a conjecture! Eve has a great idea of herself, and there is some difficulty in prevailing on her to quit her own image the first time she discovers its reflection in the water. She gives the following account of herself to Adam:

That day I oft remember, when from sleep
 I first awak'd, and found myself repos'd
 Under a shade of flow'rs, much wond'ring where
 And what I was, whence thither brought and how.
 Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
 Of waters issued from a cave, and spread
 Into a liquid plain, then stood unmov'd,
 Pure as the expanse of Heav'n; I thither went
 With unexperienc'd thought, and laid me down
 On the green bank, to look into the clear
 Smooth lake, that to me seem'd another sky:
 As I bent down to look, just opposite
 A shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd,
 Bending to look on me; I started back,
 It started back; but pleas'd I soon return'd,
 Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answer'ing looks
 Of sympathy and love.

The poet afterwards adds:

So spake our general mother, and with eyes
 Of conjugal attraction unprov'd,
 And meek surrender, half embracing, lean'd

On our first father; half her swelling breast
 Naked met his under the flowing gold
 Of her loose tresses hid: he in delight
 Both of her beauty and submissive charms,
 Smil'd with superior love, as Jupiter
 On Juno smiles, when he impregns the clouds
 That shed the May flowers.

The same thought is repeated with greater simplicity, and perhaps even beauty, in the beginning of the Fifth Book:

So much the more

His wonder was to find unwaken'd Eve
 With tresses discompos'd and glowing cheek,
 As through unquiet rest: he, on his side,
 Leaning half-rai's'd, with looks of cordial love,
 Hung over her enamour'd, and beheld
 Beauty, which, whether waking or asleep,
 Shot forth peculiar graces; then with voice
 Mild, as when Zephyrus on Flora breathes,
 Her hand soft touching, whisper'd thus: Awake
 My fairest, my espous'd, my latest found,
 Heav'n's last best gift, my ever new delight,
 Awake.....

The general style, indeed, in which Eve is addressed by Adam, or described by the poet, is in the highest strain of compliment:

When Adam thus to Eve. Fair consort, the hour
 Of night approaches.
 To whom thus Eve, with perfect beauty adorned.
 To whom our general ancestor replied,
 Daughter of God and Man, accomplish'd Eve.

Eve is herself so well convinced that these epithets are her due that the idea follows her in her sleep, and she dreams of herself as the paragon of nature, the wonder of the universe:

Methought

Close at mine ear, one call'd me forth to walk,
 With gentle voice, I thought it thine; it said,

Why sleep'st thou, Eve? now is the pleasant time,
 The cool, the silent, save where silence yields
 To the night-warbling bird, that now awake
 Tunes sweetest his love-labour'd song; now reigns
 Full-orb'd the moon, and with more pleasing light
 Shadowy sets off the face of things; in vain
 If none regard; Heav'n wakes with all his eyes,
 Whom to behold but thee, Nature's desire?
 In whose sight all things joy, with ravishment
 Attracted by thy beauty still to gaze.

This is the very topic, too, on which the Serpent afterwards enlarges with so much artful insinuation and fatal consequences of success. 'So talked the spirited sly snake'.—The conclusion of the foregoing scene, in which Eve relates her dream, and Adam comforts her, is such an exquisite piece of description that, though not to my immediate purpose, I cannot refrain from quoting it:

So cheer'd he his fair spouse, and she was cheer'd;
 But silently a gentle tear let fall
 From either eye, and wip'd them with her hair;
 Two other precious drops that ready stood,
 Each in their crystal sluice, he, ere they fell,
 Kiss'd as the gracious signs of sweet remorse
 And pious awe, that fear'd to have offended.

The formal eulogy on Eve which Adam addresses to the Angel, in giving an account of his own creation and hers, is full of elaborate grace:

Under his forming hand a creature grew,
 so lovely fair,
 That what seem'd fair in all the world seem'd now
 Mean, or in her summ'd up, in her contain'd
 And in her looks, which from that time infus'd
 Sweetness into my heart, unfelt before,
 And into all things from her air inspir'd
 The spirit of love and amorous delight,

That which distinguishes Milton from the other poets, who have pampered the eye and fed the imagination with exuberant descriptions of female beauty, is the moral severity with which he has tempered them. There is not a line in his works which tends to licentiousness, or the impression of which, if it has such a tendency, is not effectually checked by thought and sentiment. The following are two remarkable instances:

In shadier bower
 More secret and sequester'd, though but feign'd,
 Pan or Sylvanus never slept, nor Nymph,
 Nor Faunus haunted. Here in close recess,
 With flowers, garlands, and sweet smelling herbs,
 Espoused Eve deck'd first her nuptial bed,
 And heavenly quires the hymenœan sung,
 What day the genial Angel to our sire
 Brought her in naked beauty more adorn'd,
 More lovely than Pandora, whom the Gods
 Endow'd with all their gifts, and O too like
 In sad event, when to th' unwiser son
 Of Japhet, brought by Hermes, she ensnar'd
 Mankind by her fair looks, to be aveng'd
 On him who had stole Jove's authentic fire.

The other is a passage of extreme beauty and pathos blended. It is the one in which the Angel is described as the guest of our first ancestors:

Meanwhile at table Eve
 Minister'd naked, and their flowing cups
 With pleasant liquors crown'd: O innocence
 Deserving Paradise! if ever, then,
 Then had the sons of God excuse to have been
 Enamour'd at that sight: but in those hearts
 Love unlibidinous reigned, nor jealousy
 Was understood, the injur'd lover's Hell.

The character which a living poet has given of Spenser would be much more true of Milton:

Yet not more sweet
Than pure was he, and not more pure than wise;
High Priest of all the Muses' mysteries.

Spenser, on the contrary, is very apt to pry into mysteries which do not belong to the Muses. Milton's voluptuousness is not lascivious nor sensual. He describes beautiful objects for their own sakes. Spenser has an eye to the consequences, and steeps every thing in pleasure, often not of the purest kind. The want of passion has been brought as an objection against Milton, and his Adam and Eve have been considered as rather insipid personages, wrapped up in one another, and who excite but little sympathy in anyone else. I do not feel this objection myself: I am content to be spectator in such scenes, without any other excitement. In general, the interest in Milton is essentially epic, and not dramatic; and the difference between the epic and the dramatic is this, that in the former the imagination produces the passion, and in the latter the passion produces the imagination. The interest of epic poetry arises from the contemplation of certain objects in themselves grand and beautiful; the interest of dramatic poetry, from sympathy with the passions and pursuits of others; that is, from the practical relations of certain persons to certain objects, as depending on accident or will.

The Pyramids of Egypt are epic objects: the imagination of them is necessarily attended with passion; but they have no dramatic interest till circumstances connect them with some human catastrophe. Now a poem might be constructed almost entirely of such images, of the highest intellectual passion, with little dramatic interest; and it is in this way that Milton has in a great measure constructed his poem. That is not its fault, but its excellence. The fault is in those who have no idea but of one kind of in-

terest. But this question would lead to a longer discussion than I have room for at present. I shall conclude these extracts from Milton with two passages, which have always appeared to me be highly affecting, and to contain a fine discrimination of character:

O unexpected stroke, worse than of Death!
Must I thus leave thee, Paradise? thus leave
Thee, native soil, these happy walks and shades,
Fit haunt of Gods? Where I had hope to spend,
Quiet, though sad, the respite of that day
That must be mortal to us both. O flowers,
That never will in other climate grow,
My early visitation and my last
At even, which I bred up with tender hand
From the first opening bud, and gave ye names,
Who now shall rear ye to the sun, or rank
Your tribes, and water from th' ambrosial fount?
Thee, lastly, nuptial bow'r, by me adorn'd
With what to sight or smell was sweet, from thee
How shall I part, and whither wander down
Into a lower world, to this obscure
And wild? how shall we breathe in other air
Less pure, accusom'd to immortal fruits?

This is the lamentation of Eve on being driven out of Paradise. Adam's reflections are in a different strain, and still finer. After expressing his submission to the will of his Maker, he says:

This most afflicts me, that departing hence
As from his face I shall be hid, depriv'd
His blessed countenance; here I could frequent
With worship place by place where he vouchsaf'd
Presence divine, and to my sons relate,
On this mount he appeared, under this tree
Stood visible, among these pines his voice
I heard, here with him at this fountain talk'd:
So many grateful altars I would rear
Of grassy turf, and pile up every stone
Of lustre from the brook, in memory
Or monument to ages, and thereon

Offer sweet-smelling gums and fruits and flowers.
In yonder nether-world where shall I seek
His bright appearances, or footstep trace?
For though I fled him angry, yet, recall'd,
To life prolong'd and promis'd race, I now
Gladly behold though but his utmost skirts
Of glory, and far off his steps adore.

III

ON MR WORDSWORTH'S POEM
The Excursion.

IN power of intellect, in lofty conception, in the depth of feeling, at once simple and sublime, which pervades every part of it, and which gives to every object an almost preternatural and preter-human interest, this work has seldom been surpassed. The poem of *The Excursion* resembles that part of the country in which the scene is laid. It has the same vastness and magnificence, with the same nakedness and confusion. It has the same overwhelming, oppressive power. It excites or recalls the same sensations which those who have traversed that wonderful scenery must have felt. We are surrounded with the constant sense and superstitious awe of the collective power of matter, of the gigantic and eternal forms of nature, on which, from the beginning of time, the hand of man has made no impression. Here are no dotted lines, no hedge-row beauties, no box-tree borders, no gravel walks, no square mechanic inclosures; all is left loose and irregular in the rude chaos of aboriginal nature. The boundaries of hill and valley are the poet's only geography, where we wander with him incessantly over deep beds of moss and waving fern, amidst the troops of red-deer and wild animals. Such is the severe

simplicity of Mr Wordsworth's taste that I doubt whether he would not reject a druidical temple, or time-hallowed ruin, as too modern and artificial for his purpose. He only familiarizes himself or his readers with a stone, covered with lichens, which has slept in the same spot of ground from the creation of the world, or with the rocky fissure between two mountains caused by thunder, or with a cavern scooped out by the sea. His mind is, as it were, coeval with the primary forms of things; his imagination holds immediately from nature, and 'owes no allegiance' but 'to the elements.'

The Excursion may be considered as a philosophical pastoral poem, as a scholastic romance. It is less a poem on the country than on the love of the country. It is not so much a description of natural objects as of the feelings associated with them; not an account of the manners of rural life, but the result of the poet's reflections on it. He does not present the reader with a lively succession of images or incidents, but paints the outgoings of his own heart, the shapings of his own fancy. He may be said to create his own materials; his thoughts are his real subject. His understanding broods over that which is 'without form and void', and 'makes it pregnant'. He sees all things in himself. He hardly ever avails himself of remarkable objects or situations, but, in general, rejects them as interfering with the workings of his own mind as disturbing the smooth, deep, majestic current of his own feelings. Thus his descriptions of natural scenery are not brought home distinctly to the naked eye by forms and circumstances, but every object is seen through the medium of innumerable recollections, is clothed with the haze of imagination like a glittering vapour, is obscured with the excess of glory, has the shad-

owy brightness of a waking dream. The image is lost in the sentiment, as sound in the multiplication of echoes,

And visions, as prophetic eyes avow,
Hang on each leaf, and cling to every bough.

In describing human nature, Mr Wordsworth equally shuns the common 'vantage-grounds of popular story, of striking incident, or fatal catastrophe, as cheap and vulgar modes of producing an effect. He scans the human race as the naturalist measures the earth's zone, without attending to the picturesque points of view, the abrupt inequalities of surface. He contemplates the passions and habits of men, not in their extremes, but in the first elements; their follies and vices, not at their height, with all their embossed evils upon their heads, but as lurking in embryo, the seeds of the disorder inwoven with our very constitution. He only sympathizes with those simple forms of feeling which mingle at once with his own identity, or with the stream of general humanity. To him the great and the small are the same; the near and the remote; what appears, and what only is. The general and the permanent, like the Platonic ideas, are his only realites. All accidental varieties and individual contrasts are lost in an endless continuity of feeling; like drops of water in the ocean-stream! An intense intellectual egotism swallows up everything. Even the dialogues introduced in the present volume are soliloquies of the same character, taking different views of the subject. The recluse, the pastor, and the pedlar, are three persons in one poet. I myself disapprove of these 'interlocutions between Lucius and Caius' as impertinent babbling, where there is no dramatic distinction of character. But the evident

scope and tendency of Mr Wordsworth's mind is the reverse of dramatic. It resists all change of character, all variety of scenery, all the bustle, machinery, and pantomime of the stage, or of real life, whatever might relieve, or relax, or change the direction of its own activity, jealous of all competition. The power of his mind preys upon itself. It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe. He lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought. His imagination lends life and feeling only to 'the bare trees and mountains bare'; peoples the viewless tracts of air, and converses with the silent clouds!

I could have wished that our author had given to his work the form of a didactic poem altogether, with only occasional digressions or allusions to particular instances. But he has chosen to encumber himself with a load of narrative and description, which sometimes hinders the progress and effect of the general reasoning, and which, instead of being inwoven with the text, would have come in better in plain prose as notes at the end of the volume. Mr Wordsworth, indeed, says finely, and perhaps as truly as finely:

Exchange the shepherd's frock of native grey
For robes with regal purple tinged; convert
The crook into a sceptre; give the pomp
Of circumstance; and here the tragic Muse
Shall find apt subjects for her highest art.
Amid the groves, beneath the shadowy hills,
The generations are prepared; the pangs,
The internal pangs are ready; the dread strife
Of poor humanity's afflicted will,
Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.

But he immediately declines availing himself of these resources of the rustic moralist: for the priest, who officiates as 'the sad historian of the pensive plain', says in reply:

Our system is not fashioned to preclude
That sympathy which you for others ask:
And I could tell, not travelling for my theme
Beyond the limits of these humble graves,
Of strange disasters; but I pass them by,
Loth to disturb what Heaven hath hushed to peace.

There is, in fact, in Mr Wordsworth's mind an evident repugnance to admit anything that tells for itself without the interpretation of the poet, a fastidious antipathy to immediate effect, a systematic unwillingness to share the palm with his subject. Where, however, he has a subject presented to him, 'such as the meeting soul may pierce', and to which he does not grudge to lend the aid of his fine genius, his powers of description and fancy seem to be little inferior to those of his classical predecessor, Akenside. Among several others which I might select, I give the following passage, describing the religion of ancient Greece:

In that fair clime, the lonely herdsman, stretch'd
On the soft grass through half a summer's day,
With music lulled his indolent repose:
And in some fit of weariness, if he,
When his own breath was silent, chanced to hear
A distant strain, far sweeter than the sounds
Which his poor skill could make, his fancy fetch'd
Even from the blazing chariot of the sun,
A beardless youth, who touched a golden lute,
And filled the illumined groves with ravishment.
The nightly hunter, lifting up his eyes
Towards the crescent moon, with grateful heart
Called on the lovely wanderer, who bestowed
That timely light, to share his joyous sport:
And hence, a beaming Goddess with her Nymphs
Across the lawn and through the darksome grove,
(Nor unaccompanied with tuneful notes
By echo multiplied from rock or cave)
Swept in the storm of chase, as moon and stars
Glance rapidly along the clouded heavens,
When winds are blowing strong. The traveller slaked
His thirst from rill, or gushing fount, and thanked

The Naiad.—Sun-beams, upon distant hills
Gliding apace, with shadows in their train,
Might, with small help from fancy, be transformed
Into fleet Oreads, sporting visibly.
The zephyrs, fanning as they passed their wings,
Lacked not for love, fair objects, whom they wooed
With gentle whisper. Withered boughs grotesque,
Stripped of their leaves and twigs by hoary age,
From depth of shaggy covert peeping forth
In the low vale, or on steep mountain side:
And sometimes intermixed with stirring horns
Of the live deer, or goat's depending beard;
These were the lurking satyrs, a wild brood
Of gamesome Deities! or Pan himself.
The simple shepherd's awe-inspiring God.

The foregoing is one of a succession of splendid passages, equally enriched with philosophy and poetry, tracing the fictions of Eastern mythology to the immediate intercourse of the imagination with Nature, and to the habitual propensity of the human mind to endow the outward forms of being with life and conscious motion. With this expansive and animating principle, Mr Wordsworth has forcibly, but somewhat severely, contrasted the cold, narrow, lifeless spirit of modern philosophy:

How, shall our great discoverers obtain
From sense and reason less than these obtained,
Though far misled? Shall men for whom our age
Unbaffled powers of vision hath prepared,
To explore the world without, and world within,
Be joyless as the blind? Ambitious souls—
Whom earth at this late season hath produced
To regulate the moving spheres, and weigh
The planets in the hollow of their hand;
And they who rather dive than soar, whose pains
Have solved the elements, or analyzed
The thinking principle—shall they in fact
Prove a degraded race? And what avails
Renown, if their presumption make them such?
Inquire of ancient wisdom; go, demand

Of mighty nature, if 'twas ever meant
That we should pry far off, yet be unraised:
That we should pore, and dwindle as we pore,
Viewing all objects unremittingly
In disconnection, dead and spiritless;
And still dividing and dividing still
Break down all grandeur, still unsatisfied
With the perverse attempt, while littleness
May yet become more little; waging thus
An impious warfare with the very life
Of our own souls!—And if, indeed, there be
An all-pervading spirit, upon whom
Our dark foundations rest, could he design,
That this magnificent effect of power,
The earth we tread, the sky which we behold
By day, and all the pomp which night reveals,
That these—and that superior mystery,
Our vital frame, so fearfully devised,
And the dread soul within it—should exist
Only to be examined, pondered, searched,
Probed, vexed, and criticised—to be prized
No more than as a mirror that reflects
To proud self-love her own intelligence?

From the chemists and metaphysicians our author turns to the laughing sage of France, Voltaire. 'Poor gentleman, it fares no better with him, for he's a wit'. We cannot, however, agree with Mr. Wordsworth, that *Candide* is *dull*. It is, if our author pleases, 'the production of a scoffer's pen', or it is any thing but dull. It may not be proper in a grave, discreet, orthodox, promising young divine, who studies his opinions in the contraction or distension of his patron's brow, to allow any merit to a work like *Candide*; but I conceive that it would have been more manly in Mr Wordsworth, nor do I think it would have hurt the cause he espouses, if he had blotted out the epithet, after it had peevishly escaped him. Whatsoever savours of a little, narrow, inquisitorial spirit, does not sit well on a poet and a man of genius. The prejudices of a philosopher are not

natural. There is a frankness and sincerity of opinion, which is a paramount obligation in all questions of intellect, though it may not govern the decisions of the spiritual courts, who may, however, be safely left to take care of their own interests. There is a plain directness and simplicity of understanding, which is the only security against the evils of levity, on the one hand, or of hypocrisy, on the other. A speculative bigot is a solecism in the intellectual world. I can assure Mr Wordsworth that I should not have bestowed so much serious consideration on a single voluntary perversion of language, but that my respect for his character makes me jealous of his smallest faults!

With regard to his general philippic against the contractedness and egotism of philosophical pursuits, I only object to its not being carried farther. I shall not affirm with Rousseau (his authority would perhaps have little weight with Mr Wordsworth)—*Tout homme reflechi est méchant*; but I conceive that the same reasoning, which Mr Wordsworth applies so eloquently and justly to the natural philosopher and metaphysician, may be extended to the moralist, the divine, the politician, the orator, the artist, and even the poet. And why so? Because, wherever an intense activity is given to any one faculty, it necessarily prevents the due and natural exercise of others. Hence all those professions or pursuits, where the mind is exclusively occupied with the idea of things as they exist in the imagination or understanding, as they call for the exercise of intellectual activity, and not as they are connected with practical good or evil, must check the genial expansion of the moral sentiments and social affections; must lead to a cold and dry abstraction, as they are found to suspend the animal functions, and relax the bodily frame. Hence the complaint of the want

of natural sensibility and constitutional warmth of attachment in those persons who have been devoted to the pursuit of any art or science, of their restless morbidity of temperament, and indifference to everything that does not furnish an occasion for the display of their mental superiority, and the gratification of their vanity. The philosophical poet himself, perhaps, owes some of his love of nature to the opportunity it affords him of analysing his own feelings, and contemplating his own powers, of making every object about him a whole-length mirror to reflect his favourite thoughts, and of looking down on the frailties of others in undisturbed leisure, and from a more dignified height.

One of the most interesting parts of this work is that in which the author treats of the French Revolution, and of the feelings connected with it, in ingenuous minds, in its commencement and its progress. The Solitary*, who, by domestic calamities and disappointments, had been cut off from society, and almost from himself, gives the following account of the manner in which he was roused from his melancholy:

From that abstraction I was roused—and how?
Even as a thoughtful shepherd by a flash
Of lightning, startled in a gloomy cave
Of these wild hills. For, lo! the dread Bastille,
With all the chambers in its horrid towers,
Fell to the ground: by violence o'erthrown
Of indignation; and with shouts that drowned
The crash it made in falling! From the wreck
A golden palace rose, or seemed to rise,
The appointed seat of equitable law
And mild paternal sway. The potent shock
I felt; the transformation I perceived,
As marvellously seized as in that moment,
When, from the blind mist issuing, I beheld

* This word is not English.

Glory—beyond all glory ever seen,
 Dazzling the soul! Meanwhile prophetic harps
 In every grove were ringing, 'War shall cease:
 Did ye not hear that conquest is abjured?
 Bring garlands, bring forth choicest flowers, to deck
 The tree of liberty!'—My heart rebounded:
 My melancholy voice the chorus joined.
 Thus was I re-converted to the world;
 Society became my glittering bride,
 And airy hopes my children. From the depths
 Of natural passion, seemingly escaped,
 My soul diffused itself in wide embrace
 Of institutions and the forms of things.

If with noise

And acclamation, crowds in open air
 Expressed the tumult of their minds, my voice
 There mingled, heard or not. And in still groves,
 Where mild enthusiasts tuned a pensive lay
 Of thanks and expectation, in accord
 With their belief, I sang Saturnian rule
 Returned—a progeny of golden years
 Permitted to descend, and bless mankind.

* * *

Scorn and contempt forbid me to proceed!
 But history, time's slavish scribe, will tell
 How rapidly the zealots of the cause
 Disbanded—or in hostile ranks appeared;
 Some, tired of honest service; these outdone,
 Disgusted, therefore, or appalled, by aims
 Of fiercer zealots.—So confusion reigned,
 And the more faithful were compelled to exclaim,
 As Brutus did to virtue, 'Liberty,
 I worshipped thee, and find thee but a shade.'
 SUCH RECATANTION HAD FOR ME NO CHARM,
 NOR WOULD I BEND TO IT.

The subject is afterwards resumed, with the
 same magnanimity and philosophical firmness:

For that other loss,
 The loss of confidence in social man,
 By the unexpected transports of our age
 Carried so high, that every thought—which looked
 Beyond the temporal destiny of the kind—

To many seemed superfluous; as no cause
For such exalted confidence could e'er
Exist; so, none is now for such despair.
The two extremes are equally remote
From truth and reason;—do not, then, confound
One with the other, but reject them both;
And choose the middle point, whereon to build
Sound expectations. This doth he advise
Who shared at first the illusion. At this day,
When a Tartarian darkness overspreads
The groaning nations; when the impious rule,
By will, or by established ordinance,
Their own dire agents, and constrain the good
To acts which they abhor; though I bewail
This triumph, yet the pity of my heart
Prevents me not from owning that the law,
By which mankind now suffers, is most just.
For by superior energies; more strict
Affiance in each other; faith more firm
In their unhallowed principles; the bad
Have fairly earned a victory o'er the weak,
The vacillating, inconsistent good.

In the application of these memorable lines, I should, perhaps, differ a little from Mr Wordsworth; nor can I indulge with him in the fond conclusion afterwards hinted at, that one day *our* triumph, the triumph of humanity and liberty, may be complete. For this purpose, I think several things necessary which are impossible. It is a consummation which cannot happen till the nature of things is changed, till the many become as united as the *one*, till romantic generosity shall be as common as gross selfishness, till reason shall have acquired the obstinate blindness of prejudice, till the love of power and of change shall no longer goad man on to restless action, till passion and will, hope and fear, love and hatred, and the objects proper to excite them, that is, alternate good and evil, shall no longer sway the bosoms and businesses of men. All things move, not in progress, but in a ceaseless

round; our strength lies in our weakness; our virtues are built on our vices; our faculties are as limited as our being; nor can we lift man above his nature more than above the earth he treads. But though I cannot weave over again the airy, unsubstantial dream, which reason and experience have dispelled,

What though the radiance, which was once so bright,
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour.
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower.

yet I will never cease, nor be prevented from returning on the wings of imagination to that bright dream of my youth; that glad dawn of the day-star of liberty; that spring time of the world, in which the hopes and expectations of the human race seemed opening in the same gay career with my own; when France called her children to partake her equal blessings beneath her laughing skies; when the stranger was met in all her villages with dance and festive songs, in celebration of a new and golden era; and when, to the retired and contemplative student, the prospects of human happiness and glory were seen ascending, like the steps of Jacob's ladder, in bright and never-ending succession. The dawn of that day was suddenly overcast; that season of hope is past; it is fled with the other dreams of my youth, which I cannot recall, but has left behind it traces, which are not to be effaced by Birth-day and Thanksgiving odes, or the chaunting of *Te Deums* in all the churches of Christendom. To those hopes eternal regrets are due; to those who maliciously and wilfully blasted them, in the fear that they might be accomplished, I feel no less what I owe—hatred and scorn as lasting!

Mr Wordsworth's writings exhibit all the internal power, without the external form, of poetry. He has scarcely any of the pomp and decoration and scenic effect of poetry: no gorgeous palaces, nor solemn temples, awe the imagination; no cities rise 'with glistening spires and pinnacles adorned'; we meet with no knights pricked forth on airy steeds; no hair-breadth 'scapes and perilous accidents by flood or field. Either from the predominant habit of his mind not requiring the stimulus of outward impressions, or from the want of an imagination teeming with various forms, he takes the common every day events and objects of nature, or rather seeks those that are the most simple and barren of effect; but he adds to them a weight of interest from the resources of his own mind, which makes the most insignificant things serious and even formidable. All other interests are absorbed in the deeper interest of his own thoughts, and find the same level. His mind magnifies the littleness of his subject, and raises its meanness; lends it his strength, and clothes it with borrowed grandeur. With him, a mole-hill, covered with wild thyme, assumes the importance of 'the great vision of the guarded mount': a puddle is filled with preternatural faces, and agitated with the fiercest storms of passion.

The extreme simplicity which some persons have objected to in Mr Wordsworth's poetry, is to be found only in the subject and the style: the sentiments are subtle and profound. In the latter respect, his poetry is as much above the common standard or capacity as in the other it is below it. His poems bear a distant resemblance to some of Rembrandt's landscapes, who, more than any other painter, created the medium through which he saw nature, and out of the stump of an old tree, a break in the sky, and a bit of water, could produce an effect almost miraculous.

Mr Wordsworth's poems in general are the history of a refined and contemplative mind, conversant only with itself and nature. An intense feeling of the associations of this kind is the peculiar and characteristic feature of all his productions. He has described the love of nature better than any other poet. This sentiment, inly felt in all its force, and sometimes carried to an excess, is the source both of his strength and of his weakness. However I may sympathize with Mr Wordsworth in his attachment to groves and fields, I cannot extend the same admiration to their inhabitants, or to the manners of a country life in general. I go along with him while he is the subject of his own narrative, but I take leave of him when he makes pedlars and ploughmen his heroes and the interpreters of his sentiments. It is, I think, getting into low company, and company, besides, that I do not like. I take Mr Wordsworth himself for a great poet, a fine moralist, and a deep philosopher; but if he insists on introducing me to a friend of his, a parish clerk, or the barber of the village, who is as wise as himself, I must be excused if I draw back with some little want of cordial faith. I am satisfied with the friendship which subsisted between Parson Adams and Joseph Andrews. The author himself lets out occasional hints that all is not as it should be among these northern Arcadians. Though, in general, he professes to soften the harsher features of rustic vice, he has given us one picture of depraved and inveterate selfishness, which I apprehend could only be found among the inhabitants of these boasted mountain districts. The account of one of his heroines concludes as follows:

A sudden illness seized her in the strength
Of life's autumnal season.—Shall I tell
How on her bed of death the matron lay,

To Providence submissive, so she thought;
But fretted, vexed, and wrought upon—almost
To anger, by the malady that gripped
Her prostrate frame with unrelaxing power,
As the fierce eagle fastens on the lamb
She prayed, she moaned—her husband's sister watched
Her dreary pillow, waited on her needs;
And yet the very sound of that kind foot
Was anguish to her ears!—'And must she rule,
Sole mistress of this house when I am gone?
Sit by my fire—possess what I possessed—
Tend what I tended—Calling it her own!'—
Enough;—I fear too much.—Of nobler feeling
Take this example:—One autumnal evening,
While she was yet in prime of health and strength,
I well remember, while I passed her door,
Musing with loitering step, and upward eye
Turned tow'rds the planet Jupiter, that hung
Above the centre of the vale, a voice
Roused me, her voice;—it said, 'That glorious star
In its untroubled element will shine
As now it shines, when we are laid in earth,
And safe from all our sorrows.' She is safe,
And her uncharitable acts, I trust,
And harsh unkindnesses, are all forgiven;
Though, in this vale, remembered with deep awe!

I think it is pushing our love of the admiration of natural objects a good deal too far to make it a set-off against a story like the preceding.

All country-people hate each other. They have so little comfort that they envy their neighbours the smallest pleasure or advantage, and nearly grudge themselves the necessaries of life. From not being accustomed to enjoyment, they become hardened and averse to it, stupid for want of thought, selfish for want of society. There is nothing good to be had in the country, or, if there is, they will not let you have it. They had rather injure themselves than oblige any one else. Their common mode of life is a system of wretchedness and self-denial, like what we read of

among barbarous tribes. You live out of the world. You cannot get your tea and sugar without sending to the next town for it: you pay double, and have it of the worst quality. The small-beer is sure to be sour, the milk skimmed the meat bad, or spoiled in the cooking. You cannot do a single thing you like; you cannot walk out, or sit at home, or write, or read, or think or look as if you did, without being subject to impertinent curiosity. The apothecary annoys you with his complaisance; the parson with his superciliousness. If you are poor, you are despised; if you are rich, you are feared and hated. If you do any one a favour, the whole neighbourhood is up in arms; the clamour is like that of a rookery; and the person himself, it is ten to one, laughs at you for your pains, and takes the first opportunity of shewing you that he labours under no uneasy sense of obligation. There is a perpetual round of mischief-making and backbiting, for want of any better amusement. There are no shops, no taverns, no theatres, no opera, no concerts, no pictures, no public buildings, no crowded streets no noise of coaches or of courts of law, neither courtiers nor courtesans, no literary parties, no fashionable routs, no society, no books, or knowledge of books. Vanity and luxury are the civilizers of the world, and sweeteners of human life. Without objects, either of pleasure or action, it grows harsh and crabbed: the mind becomes stagnant, the affections callous, and the eye dull. Man left to himself soon degenerates into a very disagreeable person. Ignorance is always bad enough; but rustic ignorance is intolerable. Aristotle has observed that tragedy purifies the affections by terror and pity. If so, a company of tragedians should be established at the public expense, in every village or hundred, as a better mode of education than either Bell's or Lancaster's.

The benefits of knowledge are never so well understood as from seeing the effects of ignorance, in their naked, undisguised state, upon the common country people. Their selfishness and insensibility are perhaps less owing to the hardships and privations, which make them, like people out at sea in a boat, ready to devour one another, than to their having no idea of any thing beyond themselves and their immediate sphere of action. They have no knowledge of, and consequently can take no interest in, anything which is not an object of their senses, and of their daily pursuits. They hate all strangers, and have generally a nickname for the inhabitants of the next village. The two young noblemen in *Guzman d'Alfarache*, who went to visit their mistresses only a league out of Madrid, were set upon by the peasants, who came round them calling out, '*a wolf*'. Those who have no enlarged or liberal ideas can have no disinterested or generous sentiments. Persons who are in the habit of reading novels and romances are compelled to take a deep interest, and to have their affections strongly excited by fictitious characters and imaginary situations; their thoughts and feelings are constantly carried out of themselves, to persons they never saw, and things that never existed: history enlarges the mind, by familiarizing us with the great vicissitudes of human affairs, and the catastrophes of states and kingdoms; the study of morals accustoms us to refer our actions to a general standard of right and wrong; and abstract reasoning, in general, strengthens the love of truth, and produces an inflexibility of principle which cannot stoop to low trick and cunning. Books, in Lord Bacon's phrase, are '*a discipline of humanity*'. Country people have none of these advantages, nor any others to supply the place of them. Having no circulating libraries to exhaust their love of the

marvellous, they amuse themselves with fancying the disasters and disgraces of their particular acquaintance. Having no hump-backed Richard to excite their wonder and abhorrence, they make themselves a bug-bear of their own, out of the first obnoxious person they can lay their hands on. Not having the fictitious distresses and gigantic crimes of poetry to stimulate their imagination and their passions, they vent their whole stock of spleen, malice, and invention on their friends and next door neighbours. They get up a little pastoral drama at home, with fancied events, but real characters. All their spare time is spent in manufacturing and propagating the lie for the day, which does its office, and expires. The next day is spent in the same manner. It is thus that they embellish the simplicity of rural life! The common people in civilized countries are a kind of domesticated savages. They have not the wild imagination, the passions, the fierce energies, or dreadful vicissitudes of the savage tribes, nor have they the leisure, the indolent enjoyments and romantic superstitions, which belonged to the pastoral life in milder climates, and more remote periods of society. They are taken out of a state of nature, without being put in possession of the refinements of art. The customs and institutions of society cramp their imaginations without giving them knowledge. If the inhabitants of the mountainous districts described by Mr Wordsworth are less gross and sensual than others, they are more selfish. Their egotism becomes more concentrated, as they are more insulated, and their purposes more inveterate, as they have less competition to struggle with. The weight of matter which surrounds them crushes the finer sympathies. Their minds become hard and cold, like the rocks which they cultivate. The immensity of their mountains

makes the human form appear little and insignificant. Men are seen crawling between heaven and earth, like insects to their graves. Nor do they regard one another any more than flies on a wall. Their physiognomy expresses the materialism of their character, which has only one principle—rigid self-will. They move on with their eyes and foreheads fixed, looking neither to the right nor to the left, with a heavy slouch in their gait, and seeming as if nothing would divert them from their path. I do not admire this plodding pertinacity, always directed to the main chance. There is nothing which excites so little sympathy, in my mind, as exclusive selfishness. If my theory is wrong, at least it is taken from pretty close observation, and is, I think, confirmed by Mr Wordsworth's own account.

Of the stories contained in the latter part of the volume, I like that of the Whig and Jacobite friends, and of the good knight, Sir Alfred Irthing, the best. The last reminded me of a fine sketch of a similar character in the beautiful poem of *Hart Leap Well*. To conclude—If the skill with which the poet had chosen his materials had been equal to the power which he has undeniably exerted over them; if the objects (whether persons or things), which he makes use of as the vehicle of his sentiments, had been such as to convey them in all their depth and force; then the production before me might indeed 'have proved a monument' as he himself wishes it, worthy of the author, and of his country. Whether, as it is, this very original and powerful performance may not rather remain like one of those stupendous, but half-finished structures, which have been suffered to moulder into decay, because the cost and labour attending them exceeded their use or beauty, I feel that it would be presumptuous in me to determine.

IV

POPE, LORD BYRON, AND MR BOWLES *.

THIS is a very proper letter for a lord to write to his bookseller, and for Mr Murray to show about among his friends, as it contains some dry rubs at Mr Bowles, and some good hits at Mr Southey and his 'invariable principles'. There is some good *hating* and some good writing in it, some coarse jests and some dogmatical assertions; but that it is by any means a *settler* of the question is what we are in all due form inclined to doubt. His Lordship, as a poet, is a little head-strong and self-willed, a spoiled child of nature and fortune; his philosophy and criticism have a tincture of the same spirit; he doles out his opinions with a great deal of frankness and spleen, saying: 'This I like, that I loathe!' but he does not trouble himself, or the reader, with his reasons, any more than he accounts to his servants for the directions he gives them. This might seem too great a compliment in his Lordship to the public.

All this *pribble-prabble* about Pope, and Milton, and Shakespeare, and what foreigners say of us, and the Venus, and Antonöus, and the Acropolis, and the Grand Canal at Venice, and the Turkish Fleet, and Falconer's Shipwreck, and ethics, and ethical poetry (with the single exception of some bold picturesque sketches in the poet's best prose style) is what might be talked by any Bond-street loungee of them all, after a last night's debauch, in the intervals between the splashings of the

* Letter to *** ***** on the Rev. W. L. Bowles's *Strictures on the Life and Writings of Pope*. By the Right Hon. Lord Byron. Third Edition. Murray.

soda-water, and the acid taste of the port wine, rising in the mouth. It is no better than that. If his Lordship had sent it in from Long's, or the Albany, to be handed about in Albemarle-street, in slips as he wrote it, it would have been very well. But all the way from Ravenna, cannot he contrive to send us something better than his own ill humour and our own commonplaces—than the discovery that Pope was a poet, and that Cowper was none; and the old story that Canova, in forming a statue, takes a hand from one, a foot from another, and a nose from a third, and so makes out the idea of perfect beauty! (I would advise his Lordship to say less about this subject of *virtu*, for he knows little about it; and, besides, his perceptions are at variance with his theories.) In truth, his Lordship has the worst of this controversy, though he throws out a number of pert, smart, flashy things, with the air of a man who sees company on subjects of taste, while his reverend antagonist, who is the better critic and logician of the two, goes prosing on in a tone of obsequious pertinacity and sore pleasantry, as if he were sitting (an unwelcome guest) at his lordship's table, and were awed, yet galled, by the cavalier assumption of patrician manners. I cannot understand these startling *voluntaries*, played off before the public on the ground of personal rank, nor the controversial under-song, like the drone of a bag-pipe, that forms a tedious accompaniment to them. As Jem Belcher, when asked if he did not feel a little awkward at facing Gamble, the tall Irishman, made answer, 'An' please ye, sir, when I am stript to my shirt, I am afraid of no man'; so I would advise Mr Bowles, in a question of naked argument, to fear no man, and to let no man bite his thumb at him. If his Lordship were to invite his brother-poet to his house, and to eke out a sour jest by the flavour of Monte-Pulciano

or Frontiniac; if in the dearth of argument he were to ply his friend's weak side with rich sauces and well-seasoned hospitality, '*Ah! ça est bon, ah! goutez ça!*'—if he were to point, in illustration of Pope's style, to the marble pillars, the verandas, the pier glasses, the classic busts, the flowering dessert, and were to exclaim: 'You see, my dear Bowles, the superiority of art over nature, the triumph of polished life over Gothic barbarism; we have here neither the ghosts nor fairies of Shakespeare, nor Milton's Heaven, nor *his* Hell, yet we contrive to do without them'; it might require Parson Supple's command of countenance to smile off this uncourteous address; but the divine would not have to digest such awkward raillery on an empty stomach—he would have his *quid pro quo*; his Lordship would have paid for the liberty of using his privilege of peerage. But why any man should carry the rôle of his Lordship's chaplain out of his Lordship's house, is what I see no reason for.

Lord Byron, in the preface to his tragedy, complains that Horace Walpole has had hard measure dealt him by the critics, 'firstly, because he was a lord, and secondly, because he was a gentleman'. I do not know how the case may stand between the public and a dead nobleman; but a living lord has every reasonable allowance made him, and can do what no one else can. If Lord Byron chooses to make a bad joke, by means of an ill-spent pun, it is a condescension in his Lordship: if he puts off a set of smart assertions and school-boy instances for pithy proofs, it is not because he is not able, but because he cannot be at the pains of going deeper into the question: if he is rude to an antagonist, it is construed into agreeable familiarity; any notice from so great a man appears like a favour: if he tells or recommends 'a tale of bawdry', he is not to be tied down by the

petty rules which restrict common men: if he publishes a work which is thought of too equivocal a description for the delicate air of Albemarle-street, his Lordship's own name in the title-page is sufficient to back it without the formality of a bookseller's; if a wire-drawn tragedy of his is acted, in spite of his protestations against such an appeal to the taste of a vulgar audience, the storm of pitiless damnation is not let loose upon it, because it is felt that it, would fall harmless on so high and proud a head; the gilded coronet serves as a conductor to carry off the lightning of popular criticism, which might blast the merely laurelled bard; the blame, the disappointment, the flat effect, is thrown upon the manager, upon the actors—upon anybody but the noble poet! This sounding title swells the mouth of Fame, and lends her voice a thousand circling echoes: the rank of the author, and the public charity extended to him, as he does not want it, cover a multitude of sins. What does his Lordship mean, then, by this whining over the neglect of Horace Walpole, this uncalled-for sympathy with the faded lustre of patrician and gentlemanly pretensions? Has *he* had only half his fame? or does he already feel, with morbid anticipation, the retiring ebb of that overwhelming tide of popularity, which, having been raised too high by adventitious circumstances, is lost in flats and shallows, as soon as their influence is withdrawn? Lord Byron has been twice as much talked of as he would have been had he not been Lord Byron. His rank and genius have been happily placed 'each other's beams to share', and both together, by their mutually reflected splendour, may be said to have melted the public coldness into the very wantonness of praise: the faults of the man (real or supposed) have only given a dramatic interest to his works.

Whence, then, this repining, this ungracious cavilling, this *got-up* ill humour? We load his Lordship with ecstatic admiration, with unqualified ostentatious eulogies; and he throws them stifling back in our face: he thanks us with cool, cutting contempt: he asks us for our voices, 'our sweet voices', like Coriolanus; and, like Coriolanus, disdains us for the unwholesome gift. Why, then, does he ask for it? If, as a lord he holds in contempt and abhorrence the willing, delighted homage, which the public pay to the poet, let him retire and feed the pride of birth in stately solitude, or take his place among his equals; but if he does not find this enough, and wants our wondering tribute of applause to satisfy his craving vanity, and make him something more than a mere vulgar lord among hundreds of other lords, why dash the cup of delicious poison which, at his uneasy request, we tender him, to the ground, with indignant reckless hands, and tell us that he scorns equally our censure or our praise? If he looks upon both as equal impertinence, he can easily escape out of the reach of both by ceasing to write; we shall in that case soon cease to think of his Lordship: but if he cannot do without our good opinion, why affect all this coyness, coldness, and contempt? If he says he writes not to please us, but to live by us, that only alters the nature of the obligation, and he might still be civil to Mr Murray's customers. Whether he is independent of public opinion, or dependent on it, he need not be always sending his readers to Coventry. When we come to offer him our demonstrations of good will, he should not kick us down stairs. If he persists in this humour, the distaste may in time 'become mutual'.

Before we proceed, there is one thing in which we must say we heartily agree with Lord Byron; and that is the ridicule with which he treats

Mr Bowles's editorial inquisition into the moral character of Pope. It is a pure piece of clerical priggism. If Pope was not free from vice, we should like to know who is. He was one of the most faultless of poets, both in his life and in his writings. We should not care to throw the first stone at him. We do not wonder at Lord Byron's laughing outright at Mr Bowles's hysterical horrors at poor Pope's platonic peccadillos, nor at his being a little impatient of the other's attempt to make himself a *make-believe* character of perfection out of the 'most small faults' he could rake up against the reputation of an author, whom he was bound either not to edit or not to injure. But we think his Lordship turns the tables upon the divine, and gets up into the reading-desk himself, without the proper canonical credentials when he makes such a fuss as he does about didactic or moral poetry as the highest of all others, because moral truth and moral conduct are of such vast and paramount concernment in human life. But because they are such good things in themselves, does it follow that they are the better for being put into rhyme? We see no connexion between 'ends of verse, and sayings of philosophers'. This reasoning reminds us of the critic who said that the only poetry he knew of, good for anything, was the four lines, beginning 'Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November', for that these were really of some use in finding out the number of days in the different months of the year. The rules of arithmetic are important in many respects, but we do not know that they are the fittest subjects of poetry. Besides, Pope was not the only moral poet, nor are we sure that we understand his moral system, or that Lord Byron understands it, or that he understood it himself. Addison paraphrased the *Psalms* and Blackmore sung the Creation: yet Pope has written

a lampoon upon the one, and put the other in his *Dunciad*. Mr Bowles has numbers of manuscript sermons by him, the morality of which, we will venture to say, is quite as pure, as orthodox, as that of the unpublished cantos of *Don Juan*; yet we doubt whether Mr Murray, the Mæcenæas of poetry and orthodoxy, would give as much for the one as for the other. We do not look for the flowers of fancy in moral treatises, nor for a homily in his Lordship's irregular stanzas. The Decalogue, as a practical prose composition, or as a body of moral laws and precepts, is of sufficient weight and authority; but we should not regard the putting of this into heroic verse as an effort of the highest poetry. That 'Sternhold and Hopkins had great qualms' is no imputation on the pious raptures of the Hebrew bard: and we suspect his Lordship himself would object to the allegory in Spenser, as a drawback on the poetry, if its in other respects to his Lordship's taste, which is more than we can pretend to determine. The Noble Letter-writer thus moralizes on this subject, and transposes the ordinary critical canons somewhat arbitrarily and sophistically:

'The depreciation of Pope is partly founded upon a false idea of the dignity of his order of poetry, to which he has partly contributed by the ingenuous boast,

That not in Fancy's maze he wandered long,
But stoop'd to Truth, and moraliz'd his song

He should have written "rose to truth". In my mind the highest of all poetry is ethical poetry, as the highest of all earthly objects must be moral truth. Religion does not make a part of my subject; it is something beyond human powers, and has failed in all human hands except Milton's and Dante's, and even Dante's powers are involved in

his delineation of human passions, though in supernatural circumstances. What made Socrates the greatest of men? His moral truth, his ethics. What proved Jesus Christ the Son of God, hardly less than his miracles? His moral precepts. And if ethics have made a philosopher the first of men, and have not been disdained as an adjunct to his Gospel by the Deity himself, are we to be told that ethical poetry, or didactic poetry, or by whatever name you term it, whose object is to make men better and wiser, is not the *very first order* of poetry; and are we to be told this too by one of the priesthood? It requires more mind, more wisdom, more power, than all the "forests" that ever were "walked" for their "description" and all the epics that ever were founded upon fields of battle. The *Georgics* are indisputably, and, I believe, *undisputedly*, even a finer poem than the *Æneid*. Virgil knew this: he did not order *them* to be burnt.

The proper study of mankind is man.

'It is the fashion of the day to lay great stress upon what they' call "imagination" and "invention"—the two commonest of qualities: an Irish peasant, with a little whiskey in his head, will imagine and invent more than would furnish forth a modern poem. If Lucretius had not been spoiled by the Epicurean system, we should have had a far superior poem to any now in existence. As mere poetry, it is the first of Latin poems. What then has ruined it? His ethics. Pope has not this defect: his moral is as pure as his poetry is glorious'. p. 42.

Really this is very inconsequential, incongruous reasoning. An Irish peasant, with a little whiskey in his head, would not fall upon more blunders, contradictions, and defective conclusions. Lord

Byron talks of the ethical systems of Socrates and Jesus Christ. What made the former the great man he supposes? The invention of his system, the discovery of sublime moral truths. Does Lord Byron mean to say that the mere repetition of the same precepts in prose, or the turning of them into verse, will make others as great, or will make a great man at all? The two things compared are wholly disparates. The finding out the 48th proposition in Euclid made Pythagoras a great man. Shall we say that the putting this into a grave, didactic distich would make either a great mathematician or a great poet? It would do neither the one nor the other; though, according to Lord Byron, this distich would belong to the highest class of poetry, 'because it would do that in verse which one of the greatest of men had wished to accomplish in prose'. Such is the way in which his Lordship transposes the common sense of the question, because it is his humour! The value of any moral truth depends on the philosophic invention implied in it. But this rests with the first author, and the general idea, which forms the basis of didactic poetry, remains the same, through all its mechanical transmission afterwards. The merit of the ethical poet must therefore consist in his manner of adorning and illustrating a number of these general truths which are not his own, that is, in the poetical invention and imagination he brings to the subject, as Mr Bowles has well shown, with respect to the episodes in the *Essay on Man*, the description of the poor Indian, and the lamb doomed to death, which are all the unsophisticated reader ever remembers of that much-talked-of production. Lord Byron clownishly chooses to consider all poetry but what relates to this ethical or didactic truth as 'a lie'. Is Lear a lie? Or does his Lordship prefer the story, or the moral, in Æsop's

Fables? He asks 'why must the *poet* mean the *liar*, the *feigner*, the *tale-teller*? A man may make and create better things than these'. He may make and create better things than a commonplace, and he who does not makes and creates nothing. The ethical or didactic poet necessarily repeats after others, because general truths and maxims are limited. The individual instances and illustrations, which his Lordship qualifies as 'lies', 'feigning', and 'tale-telling', are infinite, and give endless scope to the genius of the true poet. The rank of poetry is to be judged of by the truth and purity of the moral so we find it 'in the bond', and yet Cowper, we are told, was no poet. Is there any keeping in this. or is it merely an air? Again, we are given to understand that didactic poetry 'requires more mind, more power than all the descriptive or epic poetry that ever was written': and as a proof of this, his Lordship lays it down that the *Georgics* are a finer poem than the *Æneid*. We do not perceive the inference here. 'Virgil knew this: he did not order *them* to be burnt.

The proper study of mankind is man.

Does our author mean that this was Virgil's reason for liking his pastoral poetry better than his description of Dido and *Æneas*? But farther, there is a Latin poem (that of Lucretius) superior even to the *Georgics*; nay, it would have been so to any poem now in existence, but for one unlucky circumstance. And what is that? 'Its ethics!' So that ethics have spoiled the finest poem in the world. This is the rub that makes didactic poetry come in such a questionable shape. If original, like Lucretius, there will be a difference of opinion about it. If trite and acknowledged, like Pope, however pure, there will be

little valuable in it. It is the glory and the privilege of poetry to be conversant about those truths of nature and the heart that are at once original and self-evident. His Lordship ought to *have known this*. In the same passage, he speaks of imagination and invention as 'the two commonest of qualities'. We will tell his Lordship what is commoner—the want of them. 'An Irish peasant', he adds, 'with a little whiskey in his head, will imagine and invent more than'—(What? Homer, Spenser, and Ariosto? No: but than)—'would furnish forth a modern poem'. That we will not dispute. But, at any rate, when sober the next morning, he would be as 'full of wise saws and modern instances' as his Lordship; and in either case, equally positive, tetchy, and absurd!

His Lordship, throughout his pamphlet, makes a point of contradicting Mr Bowles, and, it would seem, of contradicting himself. He cannot be said to have any opinions as his own, but whatever any one else advances, he denies out of mere spleen and rashness. 'He hates the word *invariable*', and not without reason. 'What is there of human, be it poetry, philosophy, wit, wisdom, science, power, glory, mind, matter, life, or death, which is invariable?' There is one of the particulars in this enumeration which seems pretty invariable, which is death. One would think that the principles of poetry are so too, notwithstanding his peevish disclaimer: for towards the conclusion of this letter he sets up Pope as a classic model, and considers all modern deviations from it as grotesque and barbarous.

'They have raised a mosque by the side of a Grecian temple of the purest architecture; and, more barbarous than the barbarians from whose practice I have borrowed the figure, they are not contented with their own grotesque edifice, unless they destroy *the prior and purely beautiful fabric*

*which preceded**, and which shames them and theirs for ever and ever.'

Lord Byron has here substituted his own invariable principles for Mr Bowles's, which he hates as badly as Mr Southey's variable politics. Will nothing please his Lordship—neither dull fixtures, nor shining weather-cocks? We might multiply instances of a want of continuous reasoning, if we were fond of this sort of petty cavilling. Yet we do not know that there is any better quarry in the book. Why does his Lordship tell us that 'ethical poetry is the highest of all poetry', and yet that 'Petrarch the sonnetteer' is esteemed by good judges the very highest poet of Italy? Mr Bowles is a sonnetteer, and a very good one. Why does he assert, that 'the poet who executes the best is the highest, whatever his department', and then affirm in the next page that didactic poetry 'requires more mind, more wisdom, more power, than all the forests that ever were walked for their description'; and then again, two pages after, that 'a good poet can make a silk purse of a sow's ear': that is, as he interprets it, 'can imbue a pack of cards with more poetry than inhabits the forests of America?' That's a *Non sequitur*, as Partridge has it. Why, contending that all subjects are alike indifferent to the genuine poet, does he turn round upon himself, and assume, that 'the sun shining upon a warming pan cannot be made sublime or poetical?' Why does he say that 'there is nothing in nature like the bust of the Antinöus, except the Venus', which is not in nature?† Why does he call the first 'that wonderful *creation* of per-

* We have 'purest architecture' just before; and 'the prior fabric which preceded', is rather more than an inelegant pleonasm.

† See Mr Bowles's *Two Letters*.

fect beauty', when it is a mere portrait, and on that account so superior to his favourite coxcomb the Apollo? Why does he state that 'more poetry cannot be gathered into existence' than we here see, and yet that this poetry arises neither from nature nor moral exaltedness; Mr Bowles and he being at issue on this very point, viz. the one affirming that the essence of poetry is derived from nature, and his Lordship, that it consists in moral truth? Why does he consider a shipwreck as an artificial incident? Why does he make the excellence of Falconer's *Shipwreck* consist in its technicalities, and not in its faithful description of common feelings and inevitable calamity? Why does he say all this, and much more, which he should not? Why does he write prose at all? Yet, in spite of all this trash, there is one passage for which we forgive him, and here it is.

'The truth is, that in these days the grand *primum mobile* of England is *cant*; cant political, cant poetical, cant religious, cant moral; but always cant, multiplied through all the varieties of life. It is the fashion, and, while it lasts, will be too powerful for those who can only exist by taking the tone of the times. I say *cant*, because it is a thing of words, without the smallest influence upon human actions; the English being no wiser, no better, and much poorer, and more divided among themselves, as well as far less moral, than they were before the prevalence of this verbal decorum'. These words should be written in letters of gold, as the testimony of a lofty poet to a great moral truth, and we can hardly have a quarrel with the writer of them.

There are three questions which form the subject of the present pamphlet; viz. What is poetical? What is natural? What is artificial? And we get an answer to none of them. The controversy, as it is carried on between the chief com-

batants, is much like a dispute between two artists, one of whom should maintain that blue is the only colour fit to paint it with, and the other that yellow alone ought ever to be used. Much might be said on both sides, but little to the purpose. Mr Campbell leads off the dance, and launches a ship as a beautiful and poetical artificial object. But he so loads it with patriotic, natural, and foreign associations, and the sails are 'so perfumed that the winds are love-sick', that Mr Bowles darts upon and seizes it as contraband to art, swearing that it is no longer the work of the shipwright, but of Mr Campbell's lofty poetic imagination; and dedicates its stolen beauty to the right owners, the sun, the winds, and the waves. Mr Campbell, in his eagerness to make all sure, having overstepped the literal mark, presses no farther into the controversy; but Lord Byron, who is 'like an Irishman in a row, *anybody's customer*', carries it on with good polemical hardihood, and runs a very edifying parallel between the ship without the sun, the winds and waves, and the sun, the winds, and waves without the ship. 'The sun', says Mr Bowles, 'is poetical, by your Lordship's admission'. We think it would have been so without it. But his Lordship contends, that 'the sun would no longer be poetical, if it did not shine on ships, or pyramids, or fortresses, and other works of art', (he expressly excludes 'footman's liveries' and 'brass warming-pans' from among those artificial objects that reflect new splendour on the eye of Heaven)—to which Mr Bowles replies, that let the sun but shine, and 'it is poetical *per se*', in which we think him right. His Lordship decomposes the wind into a *caput mortuum* of poetry, by making it howl through a pig-stye, instead of

Roaming the illimitable ocean wide;

and turns a water-fall, or a clear spring, into a slop-bason, to prove that nature owes its elegance to art. His Lordship is 'ill at these numbers'. Again, he affirms that the ruined temple of the Parthenon is poetical, and the coast of Attica, Cape Colonna, and the recollection of Falconer's *Shipwreck*, classical. Who ever doubted it? What then? Does this prove that *The Rape of the Lock* is not a mock-heroic poem? He assures us that a storm with cock-boats scudding before it is interesting, particularly if this happens to take place in the Hellespont, over which the noble critic swam; and makes it a question whether the dark cypress groves, or the white towers and minarets of Constantinople, are more impressive to the imagination? What has this to do with Pope's grotto at Twickenham, or the boat in which he paddled across the Thames to Kew? Lord Byron tells us (and he should know) that the Grand Canal at Venice is a muddy ditch, without the stately palaces by its side; but then it is a natural, not an artificial, canal; and finally, he asks, what would the desert of Tadmor be without the ruins of Palmyra, or Salisbury Plain without Stone-Henge? Mr Bowles, who, though tedious and teasing, has 'damnable iteration in him', and has read the Fathers, answers very properly by saying that a desert alone 'conveys ideas of immeasurable distance, of profound silence, of solitude'; and that Salisbury Plain has the advantage of Hounslow Heath, chiefly in getting rid of the ideas of artificial life, 'carts, caravans, raree-showmen, butchers' boys, coaches with coronets, and livery servants behind them', even though Stone-Henge did not lift its pale head, above its barren bosom. Indeed, Lord Byron's notions of art and poetry are sufficiently wild, romantic, far-fetched, obsolete: his taste is Oriental, Gothic; his Muse is not domesticated; there is nothing *mimminee-pimminee*, mo-

dern, polished, light, fluttering, in his standard of the sublime and beautiful. If his thoughts are proud, pampered, gorgeous, and disdain to mingle with the objects of humble, unadorned nature. his lordly eye at least 'keeps distance due' from the vulgar vanities of fashionable life; from drawing-rooms, from card-parties, and from courts. He is not a carpet poet. He does not sing the sofa, like poor Cowper. He is qualified neither for Poet-laureate nor Court-newsman. He is at issue with the *Morning Post* and *Fashionable World* on what constitutes the true pathos and sublime of human life. He hardly thinks Lady Charlemont so good as the Venus, or as an Albanian girl that he saw mending the road in the mountains. If he does not like flowers and forests, he cares as little for stars, garters, and princes' feathers, for diamond necklaces and paste buckles. If his Lordship cannot make up his mind to the quiet, the innocence, the simple, unalterable grandeur of nature, we are sure that he hates the frippery, the foppery, and pert grimace of art, quite as much. His Lordship likes the poetry, the imaginative part of art, and so do we; and so we believe did the late Mr John Scott. He likes the *sombre* part of it, the thoughtful, the decayed, the ideal, the spectral shadow of human greatness, the departed spirit of human power. He sympathizes, not with art as a display of ingenuity, as the triumph of vanity or luxury, as it is connected with the idiot, superficial, petty self-complacency of the individual and the moment (these are to him not 'luscious as locusts, but bitter as colocintida'); but he sympathizes with the triumphs of Time and Fate over the proudest works of man, with the crumbling monuments of human glory, with the dim vestiges of countless generations of men, with that which claims alliance with the grave, or kindred with the elements of nature. This is

what he calls art and artificial poetry. But this is not what anybody else understands by the terms, commonly or critically speaking. There is as little connection between the two things as between the grand-daughters of Mr Coutts, who appeared at court the other day, and Lady Godiva—as there is between a reigning toast and an Egyptian mummy. Lord Byron, through the whole of the argument, pelts his reverend opponent with instances, like throwing a stone at a dog, which the incensed animal runs after, picks up, mumbles between his teeth, and tries to see what it is made of. The question is, however, too tough for Mr Bowles's powers of mastication, and, though the fray is amusing, nothing comes of it. Between the editor of Pope and the editor of the *New Monthly Magazine*, his Lordship sits,

high arbiter,
And by decision more embroils the fray.

What is the use of taking a work of art, from which 'all the art of art is flown', a mouldering statue, or a fallen column in Tadmor's marble waste, that staggers and overawes the mind, and gives birth to a thousand dim reflections, by seeing the power and pride of man prostrate and laid low in the dust; what is there in this to prove the self-sufficiency of the upstart pride and power of man? A ruin is poetical. Because it is a work of art, says Lord Byron. No, but because it is a work of art o'erthrown. In it we see, as in a mirror, the life, the hopes, the labour, of man defeated, and crumbling away under the slow hand of time; and all that he has done reduced to nothing, or to a useless mockery. Or, as one of the bread-and-butter poets has described the same thing a little differently, in his tale of Peter Bell the potter:

The stones and tower
Seem'd fading fast away
From human thoughts and purposes,
To yield to some transforming power,
And blend with the surrounding trees.

If this is what Lord Byron means by artificial objects, there is an end of the question, for he will get no critic, no school, to differ, with him. But a fairer instance would be a snug citizen's box by the road-side, newly painted, plastered, and furnished, with everything in the newest fashion and gloss, not an article the worse for wear, and a lease of one-and-twenty years to run, and then let us see what Lord Byron, or his friend, and 'host of human life', will make of it, compared with the desolation and the waste of all these comforts, arts, and elegances. Or let him take, not the Pyramids of Egypt, but the Pavilion at Brighton, and make a poetical description of it in prose or verse. I defy him. The poetical interest, in his Lordship's transposed cases, arises out of the imaginary interest. But the truth is that, where art flourishes and attains its object, imagination droops, and poetry along with it. It ceases, or takes a different and ambiguous shape; it may be elegant, ingenious, pleasing, instructive, but if it aspires to the semblance of a higher interest, or the ornaments of the highest fancy, it necessarily becomes burlesque, as for instance in *The Rape of the Lock*. As novels end with marriage, poetry ends with the consummation and success of art. And the reason (if Lord Byron would attend to it) is pretty obvious. When all the wishes and wants are supplied, anticipated by art, there can be no strong cravings after ideal good, nor dread of unimaginable evils; the sources of terror and pity must be dried up: where the hand has done everything, nothing is left for the imagination to do or to attempt; where all

is regulated by conventional indifference, the full workings, the involuntary, uncontrollable emotions of the heart cease: property is not a poetical, but a practical, prosaic idea to those who possess and clutch it, and cuts off others from cordial sympathy; but nature is common property, the unenvied idol of all eyes, the fairy ground where fancy plays her tricks and feats; and the passions, the workings of the heart (which Mr Bowles very properly distinguishes from manners, inasmuch as they are not in the power of the will to regulate or satisfy), are still left as a subject for something very different from didactic, or mock-heroic, poetry. By *art* and *artificial*, as these terms are applied to poetry or human life, we mean those objects and feelings which depend for their subsistence and perfection on the will and arbitrary conventions of man and society; and by *nature*, and *natural* objects we mean those objects which exist in the universe at large, without, or in spite of, the interference of human power and contrivance, and those interests and affections which are not amenable to the human will. That we are to exclude art, or the operation of the human will, from poetry altogether, is what we do not affirm; but we mean to say, that where this operation is the more complete and manifest, as in the creation of given objects, or regulation of certain feelings, there the spring of poetry, *i. e.* of passion and imagination, is proportionably and much impaired. We are masters of Art, Nature is our master; and it is to this greater power that we find working above, without, and within us, that the genius of poetry bows, and offers up its highest homage. If the infusion of art were not a natural disqualifier for poetry, the most artificial objects and manners would be the most poetical: on the contrary, it is only the rude beginnings, or the ruinous decay of objects of art, or

the simplest modes of life and manners, that admit of, or harmonize kindly with, the tone and language of poetry. To consider the question otherwise is not to consider it too curiously, but not to understand it at all. Lord Byron talks of Ulysses striking his horse Rhesus with his bow, as an instance of the heroic in poetry. But does not the poetical dignity of the instrument arise from its very commonness and simplicity? A bow is not a supererogation of the works of art. It is almost peculiar to a state of nature, that is, the first and rudest state of society. Lord Byron might as well talk of a shepherd's crook, or the garland of flowers with which he crowns his mistress, as images borrowed from artificial life. He cannot make a gentleman-usher's rod poetical, though it is the pink of courtly and gentlemanly refinement. Will the bold stickler for the artificial essence of poetry translate Pope's description of Sir Plume:

Of amber-headed snuff-box justly vain,
And the nice conduct of a clouded cane,

into the same sort of poetry as Homer's description of the bow of Ulysses? It is out of the question. The very mention of the last has a sound with it like the twang of the bow itself; whereas the others, the snuff-box and clouded-cane, are of the very essence of effeminate impertinence. Pope says, in Spence's *Anecdotes*, that 'a lady of fashion would admire a star, because it would remind her of the twinkling of a lamp on a ball-night'. This is a much better account of his own poetry than his noble critic has given. It is a clue to a real solution of the difficulty. What is the difference between the feeling with which we contemplate a gas-light in one of the squares, and the crescent moon beside it, but this, that, though the brightness, the beauty perhaps,

to the mere sense, is the same or greater, yet we know that when we are out of the square, we shall lose sight of the lamp, but that the moon will lend us its tributary light wherever we go; it streams over green valley or blue ocean alike; it is hung up in air, a part of the pageant of the universe; it steals with gradual, softened state into the soul, and hovers, a fairy-apparition, over our existence! It is this which makes it a more poetical object than a patent-lamp, or a Chinese lanthorn, or the chandelier at Covent-garden, brilliant, as it is, and which, though it—were made ten times more so, would still only dazzle and scorch the sight so much the more; it would not be attended with a mild train of reflected glory; it would ‘denote no foregone conclusion’, would touch no chord of imagination, or the heart; it would have nothing romantic about it. A man can make anything, but he cannot make a sentiment! It is a thing of inveterate prejudice, of old association, of common feeling, and so is poetry, as far as it is serious. A ‘pack of cards’, a silver bodkin, a paste buckle, ‘may be imbued’ with as much mock poetry as you please, by lending false associations to it; but real poetry, or poetry of the highest order, can only be produced by unravelling the real web of associations, which have been wound round any subject by nature, and the unavoidable conditions of humanity. Not to admit this distinction at the threshold is to confound the style of Tom Thumb with that of the Moor of Venice, or Hurlothrumbo with the Doge of Venice. It is to mistake jest for earnest, and one thing for another.

How far that little candle throws its beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

The image here is one of artificial life; but it is connected with natural circumstances and romantic

interests, with darkness, with silence, with distance, with privation, and uncertain danger: it is common, obvious, without pretension or boast, and therefore the poetry founded upon it is natural, because the feelings are so. It is not the splendour of the candle itself, but the contrast to the gloom without, the comfort, the relief it holds out from afar to the benighted traveller, the conflict between nature and the first and cheapest resources of art, that constitutes the romantic and imaginary, that is, the poetical interest, in that familiar but striking image. There is more art in the lamp or chandelier; but, for that very reason, there is less poetry. A light in a watch-tower, a beacon at sea, is sublime for the same cause; because the natural circumstances and associations set it off; it warns us against danger, it reminds us of common calamity, it promises safety and hope: it has to do with the broad feelings and circumstances of human life, and its interest does not assuredly turn upon the vanity or pretensions of the maker or proprietor of it. This sort of art is co ordinate with nature, and comes into the first class of poetry, but no one ever dreamt of the contrary. The features of nature are great leading land marks, nor near and little, or confined to a spot, or an individual claimant; they are spread out everywhere the same, and are of universal interest. The true poet has therefore been described as

Creation's tenant, he is nature's heir.

What has been thus said of the man of genius might be said of the man of no genius. The spirit of poetry and the spirit of humanity are the same. The productions of nature are not locked up in the cabinets of the curious, but spread out on the green lap of earth. The flowers return with the cuckoo in the spring; the daisy

for ever looks bright in the sun; the rainbow still lifts its head above the storm to the eye of infancy or age,

So was it when my life began;
So is it now I am a man,
So shall it be till I grow old and die;

but Lord Byron does not understand this, for he does not understand Mr Wordsworth's poetry, and we cannot make him. His Lordship's nature, as well as his poetry, is something arabesque and outlandish. Again, once more, what, we would ask, makes the difference between an opera of Mozart's, and the singing of a thrush confined in a wooden cage at the corner of the street in which we live? The one is nature, and the other is art; the one is paid for, and the other is not. Madame Fodor sings the air of *Vedrai Carino* in *Don Giovanni* so divinely, because she is hired to sing it; she sings it to please the audience, not herself, and does not always like to be *encored* in it; but the thrush that awakes us at day-break with its song does not sing because it is paid to sing, or to please others, or to be admired, or criticised: it sings because it is happy: it pours the thrilling sounds from its throat, to relieve the overflowings of its own breast—the liquid notes come from, and go to, the heart, dropping balm into it as the gushing spring revives the traveller's parched and fainting lips. That stream of joy comes pure and fresh to the longing sense, free from art and affectation; the same that rises over vernal groves, mingled with the breath of morning, and the perfumes of the wild hyacinth; that waits for no audience, that wants no rehearsing, that exhausts its raptures, and still,

Hymns its good God, and carols sweet of love.

There is this great difference between nature and art, that the one *is* what the other *seems*, and gives all the pleasure it expresses, because it feels it itself. Madame Fodor sings, as a musical instrument may be made to play a tune, and perhaps with no more real delight: but it is not so with the linnet or the thrush, that sings because God pleases, and pours out its little soul in pleasure. This is the reason why its singing is (so far) so much better than melody or harmony than bass or treble, than the Italian or the German school, than quavers or crotchets, or half-notes, or canzonets, or quartets, or anything in the world but truth and nature!

To give one more instance or two of what we understand by a natural interest ingrafted on artificial objects, and of the principle that still keeps them distinct. Amelia's 'hashed mutton', in Fielding, is one that we might mention. Hashed mutton is an article in cookery, homely enough in the scale of art, though far removed from the simple products of nature; yet we should say that this common delicacy which Amelia provided for her husband's supper, and then waited so long in vain for his return, is the foundation of one of the most natural and affecting incidents in one of the most natural and affecting books in the world. No description of the most splendid and luxurious banquet could come up to it. It will be remembered, when the *Almanach des Gourmands*, and even the article on it in the last *Edinburgh Review*, are forgotten. Did Lord Byron never read Boccaccio? We wish he would learn refinement from him, and get rid of his hard *bravura* taste, and swash buckler conclusions. What makes the charm of the story of *The Falcon*? Is it properly art or nature? The tale is one of artificial life, and elegant manners, and chivalrous pretensions; but it is the fall from these,

the decline into the vale of low and obscure poverty, the having but one last loop left to hang life on, and the sacrifice of that to a feeling still more precious, and which could only give way with life itself, that elevates the sentiment, and has made it find its way into all hearts. Had Federigo Alberigi had an aviary of hawks, and preserves of pheasants without end, he and his poor bird would never have been heard of. It is not the expense and ostentation of the entertainment he sets before his mistress, but the prodigality of affection, squandering away the last remains of his once proud fortunes, that stamps this beautiful incident on the remembrance of all who have ever read it. We wish Lord Byron would look it over again, and see whether it does not most touch the chords of pathos and sentiment in those places where we feel the absence of all the pomp and vanities of art. Mr Campbell talks of a ship as a sublime and beautiful object in art. We will confess we always stop to look at the mail-coaches with no slight emotion, and, perhaps, extend our hands after some of them, in sign of gratulation. They carry the letters of friends, or relations; they keep up the communication between the heart of a country. We do not admire them for their workmanship, for their speed, for their livery—there is something more in it than this. Perhaps we can explain it by saying, that we once heard a person observe, ‘I always look at the Shrewsbury mail, and sometimes with tears in my eyes: that is the coach that will bring me the news of the death of my father and mother’. His Lordship will say, the mail-coach is an artificial object. Yet we think the interest here was not founded upon that circumstance. There was a finer and deeper link of affection that did not depend on the red painted pannels, or the *dyed garments*

of the coachman and guard. At least it strikes us so.

This is not an easy subject to illustrate, and it is still more difficult to define. Yet we shall attempt something of the sort. 1. Natural objects are common and obvious, and are imbued with an habitual and universal interest, without being vulgar. Familiarity in them does not breed contempt, as it does in the works of man. They form an ideal class; their repeated impression on the mind, in so many different circumstances, grows into a sentiment. The reason is, that we refer them generally and collectively to ourselves, as links and mementos of our various being; whereas we refer the works of art respectively to those by whom they are made, or to whom they belong. This distracts the mind in looking at them, and gives a petty and unpoetical character to what we feel relating to them. When the works of art become poetical, it is when they are emancipated from this state of 'circumscription and confine', by some circumstance that sets aside the idea of property and individual distinction. The sound of village bells,

The poor man's only music *,

excites as lively an interest in the mind as the warbling of a thrush; the sight of a village spire presents nothing discordant with the surrounding scenery.

2. Natural objects are more akin to poetry and the imagination, partly because they are not our own handy-work, but start up spontaneously, like a visionary creation, of their own accord, without our knowledge or connivance:

The earth hath bubbles, as the water hath,
And these are of them;

* Coleridge

and farther, they have this advantage over the works of art, that the latter either fall short of their pre-conceived intention, and excite our disgust and disappointment by their defects; or, if they completely answer their end, they then leave nothing to the imagination, and so excite little or no romantic interest that way. A Count Rumford stove, or a Dutch oven, are useful for the purposes of warmth or culinary dispatch. Gray's purring favourite would find great comfort in warming its nose before the one, or dipping its whiskers in the other; and so does the artificial animal, man: but the poetry of Rumford grates or Dutch ovens it would puzzle even Lord Byron to explain. Cowper has made something of the 'loud-hissing urn', though Mr Southey, as being one of the more refined 'naturals', still prefers 'the song of the kettle'. The more our senses, our self-love, our eyes and ears, are surrounded, and, as it were, saturated with artificial enjoyments and costly decorations, the more the avenues to the imagination and the heart are unavoidably blocked up. We do not say that this may not be an advantage to the individual; we say it is a disadvantage to the poet. Even 'Mine Host of Human Life' has felt its palsyng, enervating influence. Let any one (after ten years old) take shelter from a shower of rain in Exeter Change, and see how he will amuse the time with looking over the trinkets, the chains, the seals, the curious works of art. Compare this with the description of Una and the Red Cross Knight in Spenser:

Enforc'd to seek some covert nigh at hand,
A shady grove not far away they spied,
That promis'd aid the tempest to withstand:
Whose lofty trees, yclad with summer's pride,
Did spread so broad that heaven's light did hide,

Not pierceable with power of any star;
And all within were paths and alleys wide,
With footing worn, and leading inward far;
Far harbour that them seems; so in they enter'd are.

And forth they pass, with pleasure forward led,
Joying to hear the birds' sweet harmony,
Which therein shrowded from the tempest's dread,
Seem'd in their song to scorn the cruel sky.
Much can they praise the trees so straight and high,
The sailing pine, the cedar proud and tall,
The vine-prop elm, the poplar never dry,
The builder oak, sole king of forests all,
The aspen good for staves, the cypress funeral *.

Artificial flowers look pretty in a lady's head-dress; but they will not do to stick into lofty verse. On the contrary, a crocus bursting out

* Most people have felt the *ennui* of being detained under a gateway in a shower of rain. Happy is he who has an umbrella, and can escape when the first fury of the storm has abated. Turn this gateway into a broker's shop, full of second-hand furniture, tables, chairs, bedsteads, bolsters, and all the accommodations of man's life, the case will not be mended. On the other hand, convert it into a wild natural cave, and we may idle away whole hours in it, marking a streak in the rock, or a flower that grows on the sides, without feeling time hang heavy on us. The reason is that, where we are surrounded with the works of man—the sympathy with the art and purposes of man, as it were, irritates our own will, and makes us impatient of whatever interferes with it: while, on the contrary, the presence of nature, of objects existing without our intervention and control, disarms the will of its restless activity, and disposes us to submit to accidents that we cannot help, and the course of outward events, without repining. We are thrown into the hands of nature, and become converts to her power. Thus the idea of the artificial, the conventional, the voluntary, is fatal to the romantic and imaginary. To us it seems that the free spirit of nature rushes through the soul, like a stream with a murmuring sound, the echo of which is poetry.

of the ground seems to blush with its own golden light—‘a thing of life’. So a greater authority than Lord Byron has given his testimony on this subject: ‘Behold the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin; yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these’. Shakespeare speaks of

Daffodils,

That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty.

All this play of fancy and dramatic interest could not be transferred to a description of hot-house plants, regulated by a thermometer. Lord Byron unfairly enlists into the service of his argument those artificial objects which are direct imitations of nature, such as statuary, etc. This is an oversight. At this rate, all poetry would be artificial poetry. Dr Darwin is among those who have endeavoured to confound the distinctions of natural and artificial poetry, and, indeed, he is, perhaps, the only one who has gone the whole length of Lord Byron’s hypercritical and super-artificial theory. Here are some of his lines, which have been greatly admired:

Apostrophe to Steel

Hail, adamantine steel! magnetic lord,
King of the prow, the ploughshare, and the sword!
True to the pole, by thee the pilot guides
His steady course amid the struggling tides,
Braves with broad sail the immeasurable sea,
Cleaves the dark air, and asks no star but thee!

This is the true false gallop of the sublime. Yet steel is a very useful metal, and doubtless performs all these wonders. But it has not, among so many others, the virtue of amalgamating with the imagination. We might quote also his des-

cription of the spinning-jenny, which is pronounced by Dr Aikin to be as ingenious a piece of mechanism as the object it describes; and, according to Lord Byron, this last is as well suited to the manufacture of verses as of cotton-twist without end.

3. Natural interests are those which are real and inevitable, and are so far contradistinguished from the artificial, which are factitious and affected. If Lord Byron cannot understand the difference, he may find it explained by contrasting some of Chaucer's characters and incidents with those in *The Rape of the Lock*, for instance. Custance, floating in her boat on the wide sea, is different from Pope's heroine,

Launched on the bosom of the silver Thames.

Griselda's loss of her children, one by one, of her *all*, does not belong of the same class of incidents, nor of subjects for poetry, as Belinda's loss of her favourite curl. A sentiment that has rooted itself in the heart, and can only be torn from it with life, is not like the caprice of the moment, the putting on of paint and patches, or the pulling off a glove. The inbred character is not like a masquerade dress. There is a difference between the theatrical and natural, which is important to the determination of the present question, and which has been overlooked by his Lordship. Mr Bowles, however, formally insists (and with the best right in the world) on the distinction between passion and manners. But he agrees with Lord Byron, that the *Epistle to Abelard* is the height of the pathetic.

Strange that such difference should be
'Twixt tweedledum and tweedledee.

That it is in a great degree pathetic, I should be among the last to dispute; but its character is

more properly rhetorical and voluptuous. That its interest is of the highest or deepest order is what I should wonder to hear any one affirm who is intimate with Shakespeare, Chaucer, Boccaccio, our own early dramatists, or the Greek tragedians. There is more true, unfeigned, unspeakable, heart-felt distress in one line of Chaucer's tale just mentioned,

Let me not like a worm go by the way,

than in all Pope's writings put together; and I say it without any disrespect to him, too. Didactic poetry has to do with manners, as they are regulated, not by fashion or caprice, but by abstract reason and grave opinion, and is equally remote from the dramatic, which describes the involuntary and unpremeditated impulses of nature. As Lord Byron refers to the Bible, I would just ask him here, which he thinks the most poetical parts of it, the Law of the twelve tables, the book of *Leviticus*, etc.; or the *Book of Job*, Jacob's dream, the story of Ruth, etc.?

4. Supernatural poetry is, in the sense here insisted on, allied to nature, not to art, because it relates to the impressions made upon the mind by unknown objects and powers, out of the reach both of the cognizance and will of man, and still more able to startle and confound his imagination, while he supposes them to exist, than either those of nature or art. The Witches in *Macbeth*, the Furies in *Æschylus*, are so far artificial objects that they are creatures of the poet's brain; but their impression on the mind depends on their possessing attributes which baffle and set at nought all human pretence, and laugh at all human efforts to tamper with them. Satan, in Milton, is an artificial or ideal character: but would anyone call this artificial poetry? It is, in Lord

Byron's phrase, super-artificial, as well as super-human poetry. But it is serious business. Fate, if not Nature, is its ruling genius. The Pandemonium is not a baby-house of the fancy, and it is ranked (ordinarily) with natural, *i. e.* with the highest and most important order of poetry, and above *The Rape of the Lock*. I intended a definition, and have run again into examples. Lord Byron's *concretions* have spoiled me for philosophy.

THE END





